The Devil's Advocates:

The Exoneration of Iblīs in Persian Mysticism

by

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Abstract

This dissertation investigates the portrayal of the Devil, known as Iblīs, in Perso-Islamic sources from the 3rd/9th to the 8th/14th centuries, with a focus being on mystical literature. Drawing upon a variety of primary source, including the Qurʾan and its commentaries; the legends of the prophets; general histories; heresiologies; and Sufi texts and Persian mystical poetry, it aims to demonstrate that, in contrast to orthodox Islamic dogma, which describes Iblīs as a fiendish and malevolent being, numerous medieval Islamic sources, in both Arabic and Persian, portray him either as an ambiguous figure or in a positive light.

According to the story of Iblīs in the Qurʾan, when God created Adam, he ordered all the angels to bow down before him. They all obeyed except Iblīs who refused, and for this reason God cursed and banished him. While based on this account, Muslim theologians viewed Iblīs as disobedient and evil, some Persian mystics viewed him as an angelic, luminous sage (*pīr*) who is a perfect Sufi, a true monotheist, and a steadfast lover of the Divine. Their esoteric interpretations of the Qurʾanic story of Iblīs and his downfall were fundamentally different from those of mainstream Muslim theologians and exegetes.

In the view of these Persian mystics, Iblīs's refusal to prostrate himself before Adam, although exoterically considered an act of rebellion, was seen esoterically as the purest form of love and devotion to God, which elevated him to the highest ranks of Sufi sainthood. While this study will examine the notion of the sainthood of Iblīs in the works of some medieval Persian Sufis, it also proposes that the Persian mystics' embrace of Iblīs was more widespread than previously thought, and it influenced not only Persian mystical literature but also certain non-mystical genres, such as historiography, heresiology, and folklore.

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Note on Transliteration, Style, and Translation

For Arabic and Persian words, I have adopted the transliteration system of the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (IJMES). The names of authors and titles for works written in Persian, as well as citations from Persian works, regardless of whether or not they include Arabic words, have been transliterated according to the IJMES system for Persian, and the names of authors and titles of works written in Arabic, as well as citations from Arabic works, have been transliterated according to the IJMES system for Arabic. This means that the same word might be transliterated in two different ways, depending on the language in which it occurs (e.g., al-Ḥārith, waḍʿ, adhān in Arabic sources; al-Ḥāriṯ, vażʿ, aẕān in Persian sources). The final h (ه) has been dropped for both languages (e.g., qaṣīda instead of qaṣīdah).

For Pahlavi and Avestan terms and names, the standard systems established by D. N. Mackenzie and Karl Hoffman has been followed, but occasionally slight modifications have been made in order to make these terms more accessible for the non-specialists.

Terms that are mentioned in the English Oxford Dictionary Online, such as Qurʾan, Ahriman, Sufi, hadith, Sultan, etc., have not been transliterated or italicized. For the bibliography, the notes, and in general matters of style, the 16th edition of *The Chicago Manual of Style* has been followed.

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

IJMES Transliteration System for Arabic and Persian

	Arabic	Persian		Arabic	Persian		Arabic	Persian
ء	ʾ	ʾ	ز	z	z	ک	k	k
ب	b	b	ژ	—	zh	گ	—	g
پ	—	p	س	s	s	ل	l	l
ت	t	t	ش	sh	sh	م	m	m
ث	th	s̱	ص	ṣ	ṣ	ن	n	n
ج	j	j	ض	ḍ	ż	ه	h	h
چ	—	ch	ط	ṭ	ṭ	و	w	v
ح	ḥ	ḥ	ظ	ẓ	ẓ	ی	y	y
خ	kh	kh	ع	ʿ	ʿ			
د	d	d	غ	gh	gh			
ذ	dh	ẕ	ف	f	f			
ر	r	r	ق	q	q			

Vowels

Short	ـَ	a
	ـِ	i
	ـُ	u
Long	آ	ā
	و	ū
	ی	ī
Doubled	ـِیّ	iyy
	ـُوّ	uww/uvv
Diphthong	ـَو	au
	ـَی	ay

Abbreviations:

Av.	Avestan
Q	Qurʾan
MP	Middle Persian
NP	New Persian

Introduction

The way in which the Devil, known as Iblīs in Islam, has been portrayed in some of the medieval Perso-Islamic sources is one of the most fascinating and perplexing topics in the field of Islamic studies. As a general rule, and similar to the cases of most major world religions, in the orthodox Islamic accounts, the Devil and anything associated with him were deemed malevolent and wicked. Yet one encounters some ambiguous or positive descriptions of Iblīs in Perso-Islamic sources which are in direct contradiction of the orthodox tradition. This study will examine the portrayal of the religio-mythic figure of Iblīs in medieval Perso-Islamic literature, and will specifically investigate why Iblīs, who is unequivocally condemned by the Qurʾan, and hence by Muslim theologians, is sometimes accorded a positive valence by medieval authors and particularly by Iranian mystics. Based on this investigation, I argue that this proclivity to have ambiguous or positive views of Iblīs manifests itself not only in Persian Sufi sources, but also in a variety of other texts, including legends of the prophets (*Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*), universal histories, heresiologies, and polemical works.

Because the potential scope of research on Iblīs in Perso-Islamic sources is immense, the focus of this study will be limited to surveying and expounding on the ambiguous or positive references to Iblīs in such texts. After all, there is nothing strange or debatable about the negative attributes of the Devil, whereas the positive references to him constitute a neglected area of research in Islamic theology and intellectual history.

One of the problems in assigning a distinct methodology to studying the portrayal of Iblīs is the multidisciplinary nature of such a research landscape. While Iblīs is a religio-mythical figure, his presence is not limited to theological sources. From general histories and books of advice to books of romance and non-mystical works of poetry, the references to Iblīs are omnipresent. The current study examines Iblīs more with an ontological approach rather than an epistemological one. Therefore, it adheres to and agrees with the assumption that in the vast context of medieval Perso-Islamic sources, Iblīs was considered to be a real being and not a metaphorical, mythical, or allegorical entity. Even if any of the authors who wrote about Iblīs were under such impressions, it is almost impossible to find any medieval Perso-Islamic text which openly suggests that Iblīs was only an allegorical figure.

In this study, I employ the methodology of mystical, or esoteric hermeneutics, according to which a primary-source text can yield new interpretations each time it is read. The reader approaches the text with his own viewpoint and then projects meanings onto it based on everything he knows about the language and context of the text. He then moves back and forth between the text and its context, because a text always has more than one context. The knowledge obtained by the initial reading modifies his original viewpoint and the text takes on a richer interpretation with each successive reading. A hermeneutical approach is the best way to approach a text in order to glean from it meaning in a theoretically reflexive way. It allows one to go back and forth between several complementary and interdependent disciplines (religion, literature, and language) in order to access the hidden meaning of the text. One of the strengths of this methodology is that the new perspectives and contexts will invite new questions and interpretations. Most importantly, for mystical texts, ambiguity was intended by their authors. Because Persian mystics used a variety of sources and tales to elucidate the enigma surrounding the figure of Iblīs, the researcher is oblige

to look at all of the possible source materials, including Judeo-Christian literature, which helped the mystics to go beyond the confines of the established orthodoxy in forming their own distinctive "Iblisology."

Structure of the Chapters

In order to understand Iblīs, one must be aware of the account of him in the Qurʾan. Iblīs's name is mentioned in the Qurʾan eleven times, mainly in regard to his defiance of God's command. According to the commonly-repeated story, when God created Adam from clay, He ordered all the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam. All the angles obeyed except Iblīs, who refused, haughtily claiming that he was better than Adam because he had been created from fire and Adam from clay. Upon hearing this, God cursed and banished Iblīs from His presence, and Iblīs, in turn, swore to lead humans astray.

Chapter 1, which consists of two closely related parts, investigates the nuances of this story, which is repeated eight times in the Qurʾan. The first part will be about the Qurʾan, in which the story of Iblīs and his refusal to prostrate himself before Adam is related. My interpretation of Qurʾanic verses pertaining to the topic of Iblīs will, for the most part, be an esoteric one. The second part of the chapter will consist of Qurʾan commentary (*tafsīr*) to see how Muslim commentators of different denominations interpreted the Qurʾanic verses about Iblīs. The commentaries I discuss include *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān* by Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), *al-Kashshāf* by Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), *Rauż al-jinān va rūh al-jinān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾan* by Abū al-Futūḥ Rāzī (d. ca. 552/1157), *Tafsīr al-Qurʾan al-ʿaẓīm* by Sahl b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Tustarī (d. ca. 283/896), and *Kashf al-asrār va ʿuddat al-abrār* by Abū al-Fażl Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī (fl. early 5th/12th century). In

Chapter 1, I will try to demonstrate that when it came to interpreting the Qurʾanic references, even orthodox commentators such as al-Ṭabarī viewed Iblīs ambiguously rather than as a purely negative figure.

In Chapter 2 I examine the role of the Devil in Zoroastrianism and discuss some of the themes related to the Devil, known in Middle Persian (MP) as "Ahriman," that bear similarities to his portrayal in Islamic mysticism. In this chapter, I examine key Zoroastrian texts, including the Old and Young Avesta, as well as Pahlavi texts such as Bundahišn, *Škand Gumānīk Vičār*, *Dādistān-i Mēnōg ī Xrad*, *Vizīdagīhā ī Zādspram*, *Ardā Wīrāz Nāmag*, the *Dēnkard*s, as well as various Persian *rivāyāts*. I investigate how Zoroastrians perceived and portrayed the Devil, and identify echoes of their Satanology in Perso-Islamic sources.

Chapter 3 is dedicated to examining the portrayal of Iblīs in early Perso-Islamic sources, with emphasis on general histories, heresiologies, and the legends of the prophets. These include *Tārikh al-Rusul wa la-mulūk* by al-Ṭabarī, *Murūj al-dhahab wa maʿādin al-jawāhir* by ʿAlī ibn Ḥusayn al-Masʿūdī (d. 346/956), *al-Badʾ wa al-tārīkh* by Abū Naṣr al-Muṭahhar al-Maqdisī (fl. 4th/10th century), *al-Āthār al-bāqiya ʿan al-qurūn al-khāliya* by Abū Rayhān Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Bīrūnī (d. ca. 440/1048), *al-Milal wa al-niḥal* by Abū al-Fatḥ Muḥammad al-Shahristānī (d. 548/1153), *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* by Abū Isḥāq b. Khalaf Nīshābūrī (fl. ca. 5th/11th century), *ʿArāʾis al-majālis fī qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* by Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Thaʿlabī (d. 426/1035), and *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* by Nāṣir al-Dīn b. Burhān al-Dīn Rabghūzī (d. ca. 710/1310). By examining how Iblīs is described in these texts, I was able to establish that the ambiguous or even positive portrayal of Iblīs was a widespread phenomenon, and not limited to mystical or Sufi sources.

In Chapter 4, I examine the portrayal of Iblīs in early Sufi sources, with the main focus being on the *Kitāb al-Ṭawāsīn* by the great mystic martyr Abū al-Mughīth Ḥusayn ibn Manṣūr al-

Ḥallāj (d. 309/922), and on the two Persian-language works by the Persian Sufi martyr Abū al-Maʿālī ʿAyn al-Qużāt Hamadānī (d. 525/1131), namely, the *Tamhīdāt* and the *Nāmahā*. In discussing these works, I first establish that the Iblisology of both of these mystics was influenced by a number of individuals whom I dub "Iblisophile Sufis," i. e., Sufis who to varying degrees had an affinity for or were intrigued by Iblīs and his story. I then interpret the Iblisology of al-Ḥallāj and ʿAyn al-Qużāt and demonstrate that the most poignant examples of Iblisophilic writing about Iblīs belong to these two authors. Furthermore, I will demonstrate that ʿAyn al-Qużāt remains the best exegete of al-Ḥallāj's often cryptic and esoteric Iblisology.

In Chapter 5 I discuss the portrayal of Iblīs in Persian mystical poetry with emphasis on the writings of two Sufi poets, namely, Farīd al-Dīn Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ʿAṭṭār Nīshābūrī (d. ca. 618/1221) and Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Rūmī (d. 672/1273). For ʿAṭṭār, I will examine the portrayal of Iblīs in his four *maṯnavī* works, namely the *Ilāhī-nāma*, the *Asrār-nāma*, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, and *Mūṣibat-nāma*. I also demonstrate that some of ʿAṭṭār's ideas about Iblīs represented his own exposition of ʿAyn al-Qużāt's Iblisology. As for Rūmī, I discuss the influence of his teachers on his Iblisology and examine his *Dīvān* as well as his magnum opus, *Maṯnavī-yi maʿnavī*, to assess how he viewed Iblīs.

The five chapters of this study are interconnected, and, with the exception of Chapter 2, the argument of each chapter is in large part the foundation for the framework of the next chapter. The story of Iblīs begins in the Qurʾan (Chapter 1), but it appears that the Qurʾanic account was too brief to satisfy the curiosity of medieval Perso-Islamic authors. Therefore, they began to add many non-Qurʾanic elements to the story of Iblīs.

These stories are found in extra-Quranic sources, such as the legends of the prophets (*qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*), general histories, books of heresiology, and other genres (Chapter 3). Based on these

two types of sources—Qurʾanic and extra-Qurʾanic— the early Sufis began to esoterically interpret many elements of the story of Iblīs which were discussed in the above-mentioned genres, and added a third, esoteric, dimension to the account of Iblīs (Chapter 4). The Persian mystical poets then based their own expositions about Iblīs on these three genres of sources, namely, the Qurʾan, extra-Qurʾanic literature, and the early Sufis (Chapter 5).

Review of Previous Scholarship

While there are hundreds of scholarly publications in Christian and Jewish studies about Satan and his portrayal, the same cannot be said about the field of Islamic studies, in which the number publications on this topic is significantly lower. Even more scarce in modern publications is the esoteric study of the Devil pertaining to the Islamicate world. The most comprehensive work to date on the topic of Iblīs in Sufism remains Peter Awn's *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption: Iblīs in Sufi Psychology*, published in 1982. While it presents some fascinating arguments in regard to the Islamic genealogy of Iblīs, it has little to offer when it comes to in-depth discussion of Persian mystical hermeneutics. For example, in the few exoteric examples that Awn provides, he draws ʿAṭṭār's works, despite acknowledging their dubious authenticity, such as *Maẓhar al-ʿajāyib, Lisān al-ghayb* and *Ushtur-nāma,* which are now firmly established not to have been composed by ʿAṭṭār at all.[1] Most importantly, while Awn provides a few good examples of ʿAṭṭār's exegesis about the mystical attributes of Iblīs, he does not delve beyond the exoteric layers of ʿAṭṭār's arguments. He also barely touches on the treatment of Iblīs in Rūmī's works. Furthermore, in his arguments, Awn rarely engages in a discussion of the language employed by the Persian mystics with regard to

[1] Peter J. Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption: Iblīs in Sufi Psychology* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1983), 151–75.

Iblīs. His lack of knowledge about the intricacies of the Persian language in mystical poetry led Awn to assume that "Rūmī's work does not employ all of the paradoxical strains of the Iblīs motif to the extent that ʿAṭṭār employs them. Rūmī paints Iblīs as a tragic victim, yet as a tragic victim who has turned vengeful and now uses his cunning to seduce man to the lesser good. For Rūmī there is no possibility that such a malevolent force could be rehabilitated. Even Iblīs's tragedy is not sufficient to win him eternal favor in Rūmī's eyes."[2]

I argue that not only are these assumptions wrong, but they in fact contradict Rūmī's position on the topic of Iblīs. In Rūmī's works, Iblīs is hardly portrayed as a "tragic victim who has turned vengeful." Instead, Iblīs is a celestial being who has been given a great task by God; therefore, he is by no means in need of rehabilitation. Awn's analyses appear to have overlooked the imagery and complex tropes of Persian mystical poetry that are key to understanding and interpreting what Rūmī was saying.

A more recent book, *The Poetics of Iblīs: Narrative Theology in the Qurʾan* by Whitney Bodman, approaches the subject from an exegetical point of view and lacks any substantial discussion or analysis of the topic from the vantage point of Persian mysticism. Furthermore, while Awn and Bodman both characterize the story of Iblīs in terms of a tragedy/redemption dichotomy, I propose, on the basis of the Ashʿarī/ Māturīdī theological viewpoint that both ʿAṭṭār and Rūmī espoused, Iblīs is portrayed not as a tragic figure, but as a triumphant, celestial, and powerful figure whose actions are in complete harmony with the Divine will.

There are also a few recent publications on the topic of the mystical portrayal of Iblīs. Asghar Seyed Gohrab wrote a chapter entitled "Satan as the Lover of God in Islamic Mystical

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[2] Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 15.

Writings", published in 2018. Muhammad Rustom also wrote an article published in *Studia Islamica* entitled "Devil's Advocate: ʿAyn al-Quḍāt's Defence of Iblis in Context."

Iblīs's Background

In regard to the name of Iblīs, a Qurʾanic designation for the Devil, most medieval Islamic sources assume that it is taken from the root *b-l-s* to mean hopeless and despondent. Yet as scholars such as Gabriel Said Reynolds demonstrates, this is a folk etymology invented to correspond to the name of Iblīs.[3] As Reynolds and other scholars observe, the word "Iblīs" appears to have been derived ultimately from the Greek word *diabolos* and entered, after going through some changes, into Arabic through Syriac.[4]

While the existence of many demonic deities was common in ancient Middle Eastern religions, within the Abrahamic tradition, the Islamic Iblīs shares many similarities with the Judeo-Christian Satan. No research on the origins of Iblīs within the Persian mystical tradition will be complete without exploring his historical development in the literary and textual tradition of the ancient Near Eastern religions in which he first appeared. In the Jewish tradition, the noun "Satan" (*hā-shāṭān*), meaning "the adversary" or "the accuser" and with roots in the Hebrew verb *sh-ṭ-n*, appears many times, in different forms, in the Hebrew Bible. In the Hebrew Bible, anyone or any creature can be a *shāṭān*, or "adversary." Other renditions of ambiguously malevolent beings, including Nephilim, Azazel, Shāʾiyr, Lilith and Belial, do not directly correspond to the singular personhood of Satan. This ambiguity of demonic figures might explain why the Hebrew Bible had

[3] Gabriel Said Reynolds, "A Reflection on Two Qurʾānic Words (Iblīs and Jūdī), with Attention to the Theories of A. Mingana," *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 124, no. 4 (2004): 680.

[4] Reynolds, "A Reflection on Two Qurʾānic Words," 680–82.

no difficulty in associating the evil elements which befell humans with God, as there is no clear dichotomy to indicate who was responsible for evil. For example, God sent an evil spirit to stir animosity between Abimelach and the leader of Shechem as well as to King Saul to torment him.[5] Elsewhere, the prophet Isaiah has God admitting that "I form the light, and create darkness; I make peace, and create evil; I, the Lord, do all these things."[6] Exploring and unpacking these verses, which have many similarities to the Persian mystical portrayal of Iblīs, will broaden the scope of my research beyond the limits of the Perso-Islamic tradition.

At some point, the concept illustrated by the word *shāṭān* began to be personified into the being that the Abrahamic religions have come to know as Satan. This being is mentioned eighteen times across three books in the Hebrew Bible: once in 1 Chronicles (21:1), three times across two verses in Zechariah (3:11–12), and fourteen times within the first two chapters of the book of Job. In the book of Job, "the Satan" is part of God's council, serving God apparently at God's request as a judicial adversary to humans. There it is said that children of God attended a divine council and Satan was a member of that council. He does not reside in some Hell (as later Zoroastrian and Christian depicted him), but roams the earth and stands before God's throne as one of the celestial counsellors, fulfilling the role of the accuser, and specifically, reproving Job's motive for his faithfulness. Here, Satan does not appear to be intruding on council business; rather he appears to be the part of the procedure. In this role, he asks a legitimate question: does Job (or in fact any human) honour God because he benefits from God's blessings and protection? What if that protection is removed? God takes Satan's advice and tests Job with the most tragic of misfortunes by the hand of Satan. The fascinating conclusion, which is in line with the conclusions of many

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[5] Judg. 9:23; 1 Sam. 16:14–16 (American Standard Version)
[6] Isa. 45:7 (American Standard Version)

Persian mystics, is that in the Book of Job, the evil that Satan can cause can only occur with the permission of God. In other words, in order to test the true faith of humans, God can cause evil through his agent Satan.

By the end of the Babylonian captivity, with the Israelites' exposure to Babylonian as well as Persian demonography, the representation of Satan as God's archenemy rather than His agent was further developed and continued into the post-exilic period. By the time the apocrypha and pseudepigrapha texts such as *Ascension of Isaiah, Testament of Solomon,* and *Life of Adam and Eve* were composed, there appeared a host of demonic figures that gave rise to the personified Satan of the New Testament. Like Ahriman, the Zoroastrian chief demon, the Christian Satan has no positive attributes. As a malicious being, Satan is mentioned at least 35 times in the New Testament, often interchangeably with the Devil. The oldest Gospel, Mark, introduces readers to Satan in the very first chapter. This Satan has his own kingdom and is engaged in a cosmic struggle against God. In Christianity, the supernatural world is divided between two opposing forces: the one true God along with angels versus Satan and his hosts of demons and fallen angels. Humans are caught in the middle, and depending on how they believe and act, can only belong to one camp or the other. Much of what became known as the story of Lucifer and the fallen angels who opposed God is later reverberated in the Qurʾan.

In the Qurʾan, the complexities surrounding Iblīs begin with the exegetical questions pertaining to his original nature. The wording of Qurʾan 2:34, 7:11, 17:61, and 18:50 might be taken to imply that Iblīs was an angel until his refusal to obey the Divine command to prostrate himself before Adam. There is little disagreement among Muslim theologians about the issues surrounding the downfall and banishment of Iblīs. Most of them accept the Qurʾanic account in which Iblīs's downfall was the result of his refusal to prostrate himself before Adam after God

commanded all the angels to do so. According to this narrative, Iblīs committed the sin of disobedience and as a result, he was banished from God's presence and became eternally the Accursed One (*malʿūn*). Over the centuries, many Islamic legends (*qiṣaṣ*) were created around the account of Iblīs's downfall that shed some more light on the personality of Iblīs. According to these sources, before Adam came into the picture and indirectly caused Iblīs's downfall, the latter had been, for thousands of years, a celestial being whose piety, obedience, and loyalty toward God was unrivalled by any of the angels.

One group of Muslims, namely the mystics, found these stories fascinating and were baffled by what they perceived as a contradiction and a dilemma surrounding the sudden downfall of Iblīs. While the Qurʾan and its exegesis reveal some information about the chain of events that led to the fall of Iblīs, mystics were not content with this exoteric and one-dimensional explanation. Sufis, and particularly Persian esotericists, were mesmerised by the metamorphosis of Iblīs from being the most pious creature to the most despised. For Persian mystics, the Qurʾan provides little information on the mysterious personality of Iblīs and his relationship to God before Adam came into the picture. Sufis wondered how Iblīs, with his high profile and after thousands of years of servitude, could have fallen out of grace and become eternally accursed for simply refusing to bow down to Adam. What, they wondered, had the relationship between God and Iblīs been before that moment? Significantly, why was Iblīs given respite after he had sworn to lead all of Adam's children to perdition?

To answer these questions, I examine the three main categories of works that influenced and shaped Persian mystics' views of Iblīs. The first category is the Islamic sources that include two main subcategories: the Qurʾan and the *qiṣaṣ* genre. There are eleven Qurʾanic verses in which the name Iblīs occurs. Out of these eleven references, ten refer to his rebellion and the events

immediately preceding and following it. The one exception, Q 26:95, speaks of "the hosts of Iblīs" (*junūd Iblīs*) being cast into Hellfire on the Day of Judgement. Iblīs is, therefore, a name curiously connected with the refusal to prostrate himself before Adam and the reasons and motives that led to it. His name occurs far less frequently in the Qurʾan than Satan's (Shayṭān), which is used to designate the Devil in the context of his plot against Adam and Adam's progeny. What I will attempt to show is that there is an inherent distinction between the Iblīs, who is a celestial figure, and Shayṭān, whose character is the epitome of malevolence in the material world. The distinction between the two can also be seen clearly in Q 20:116–120. On this matter, the Sufi tradition appears to differ most significantly from the orthodox tradition in viewing Iblīs as gradually evolving into a complex esoteric personality, while the figure of Shayṭān remains fixed as the designation for a being of pure malevolence.

According to the Islamic legends (*qiṣaṣ*), Iblīs was the commander of a host of seven thousand angels worshipping God in the seventh heaven for eight years, and long before his fall, he aspired not to ascend beyond the seventh heaven to the Divine throne, but to descend from it through each of the heavenly spheres. After spending eight years worshipping God in each sphere, Iblīs finally reached the earth, where he crushed a rebellion of the demons and ruled on God's behalf for eight more millennia, until Adam was created and appointed vicegerent in his place, stirring him to mutiny against God. It is stories such as these that made Sufis wonder about the true nature of Iblīs and the real cause for his rebellion, and it is through such stories that I will attempt to examine the heterodox approach of Iblisophile Sufis in expounding their Iblisology.

Though my thesis is designed to inquire about some of the most prevalent features of mystical Iblisology within the Perso-Islamic tradition, the premises on which I intend to lay out my arguments are not solely drawn from Islamic beliefs, but also from pre-Islamic Iranian

demonology. After all, ʿAyn al-Qużāt, ʿAṭṭār and Rūmī came from a milieu in which the prevalence of pre-Islamic Iranian ideas had an immense impact on their writing. The second category of texts involves those that pertain to Zoroastrianism demonology. I will conduct an investigation of these texts beginning with the Avestan figure of Angra Mainyu (Evil Spirit) as one of the twin sons of the supreme God Ahūrā Mazdā, and then investigate the metamorphosis of his character into Ahriman, who in the later Pahlavi texts is not portrayed as one of the twins but as the direct negative counterpart to the Zoroastrian supreme God, Ohrmazd. Zoroaster, who proposed the belief in one supreme God, wanted to also explain the existence of evil as a consequence of free choice. The myth of the twin spirits is an ethical model he set for the choice every person is called upon to make. Adding to that is an interesting view on Ahriman's nature that is illustrated in the Pahlavi texts stating that "Ahriman has never been and will never be," which from a moralistic perspective, tended to reduce man's struggle with Ahriman to a spiritual combat within his own soul. Both of these pre-Islamic concepts loom large in the writings of Persian mystics, especially Rūmī, who in response to the issue of theodicy, places emphasis on the agency of man's ego (*nafs*) and on free will as the main source of evil.

The third and the most intensively-discussed category will be Persian Sufi works, in particular, those of ʿAṭṭār and Rūmī. Although the Sufis' systematic obsession with Iblīs started with al-Ḥallāj within the milieu of Iblisophilic Sufis in which he lived, I am proposing that it was through early Persian mystical works, such as the Iblisophilic writings of ʿAyn al- Qużāt, that the foundational hermeneutics later employed by ʿAṭṭār and Rūmī were first established. Their poetic art lies not in introducing new stories and topics, but in the twisting and reshaping of old concepts that were already widely known into something esoteric and mystical and in a way that no one had done before.

al-Ḥallāj and ʿAyn al-Qużāt portray Iblīs as a steadfast, chivalrous, and uncompromising being who was willing to become a martyr for his beliefs. Whereas, in the writings of ʿAṭṭār, Iblīs is a mournful lover of God who longs for reunion with his Beloved. As for Rūmī's Iblīs, he is a cheerful, hopeful, and carefree fellow who is confident in the boundless mercy of God as manifested in His forgiveness. I am arguing that this perhaps indicates that the way in which each of these mystics depicts Iblīs is similar to the way each of them thought a perfect mystic ought to be, or viewed himself to be, or aspired to be. I am also arguing that this shows that no matter what interpretation of Iblīs they offered, Most Iblisophile Sufis saw in Iblīs the model of the ideal Sufi.

ʿAṭṭār and Rūmī took a novel approach in which they defend and more or less exonerate Iblīs, not only from the sin of disobedience toward God, but also from being responsible for the sins committed by humans. In their view, neither man nor Iblīs is perfect, but both have the potential to redeem themselves and strive to retrieve their rightful divine place. Furthermore, there is a sharp line of demarcation in the mystics' interpretations of the biography of Iblīs, and that was one of the ways by which Sufis distinguished between the affectionate relationship that Iblīs has with God versus his vengeful relationship with Adam. It seems that there is almost no Persian mystic who refutes the fact that Iblīs is Adam's sworn enemy or at least staunch competitor for God's love. What differs from Sufi to Sufi is the interpretation of the manifestation of this love-hate dichotomy.

Researching the portrayal of Iblīs in Perso-Islamic sources poses its own host of problems. With the exception of al-Ḥallāj's *Ṭawāsīn*, in which an entire chapter is dedicated to Iblīs, finding references, let alone positive ones, to Iblīs, has been a challenging task. The name "Iblīs" is mentioned sporadically in many sources, but these often lack proper indexes. It is my hope that research into this topic will continue, with scholars sparing no effort to find more references to

Iblīs in the primary sources, so as to further illuminate this dim but vital corner of Islamic intellectual history.

Chapter 1

The Portrayal of Iblīs in the Qurʾan and in Qurʾan Commentaries

1.1 Introduction

The name Iblīs first appears in the Qurʾan. In total, there are eleven instances in nine chapters (*sūra*) of the Qurʾan in which he is mentioned. Those eleven instances are in chapters al-Baqara (Q 2:34); al-Aʿrāf (Q 7:11); al-Ḥijr (Q 15:31–32); al-Isrāʾ (Q 17:61); al-Kahf (Q 18:50); Ṭāhā (Q 20:116); al-Shuʿarāʾ (Q 26:95); al-Ṣabā (Q 34:20); and Ṣād (Q 38:74–75). Out of these eleven instances there are seven recurring occasions on which the name of Iblīs is mentioned in the context of the story of the creation of the first man, Adam. These more or less similar accounts follow the same structure: After God fashioned Adam from clay, He ordered all the angels to prostrate themselves before this newly created being; all of the angels obeyed God's command except Iblīs who, on account of his pride, refused to prostrate himself before Adam. Because of this disobedience he was cursed and banished from God's sight. Iblīs in return promised to mislead Adam and his progeny.

In all seven Qurʾanic instances of this story there are three recurring elements which remain constant: the creation of Adam; God's commandment to the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam; and Iblīs's refusal to do so. There are, however, subtle differences in the narrative which are worth examining in detail. It is in these subtle alterations to the narrative of this Qurʾanic story that one encounters the first clues as to the character of Iblīs that later developed into full blown mystical accounts. It is not the aim of this chapter to delve fully into the entire Qurʾanic corpus associated with the Devil. Peter Awn in his book *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption: Iblīs in Sufi*

Psychology, and more recently Whitney Bodman in his book *The Poetics of Iblīs: Narrative Theology in the Qurʾan*, have provided ample evidence about the portrayal of Iblīs in the Qurʾan from both theological and literary perspectives. The aim of this chapter is to demonstrate that the esoteric and paradoxical elements that Persian Sufis often associated with Iblīs's character have their roots in the Qurʾan itself.

For this reason, it is also imperative to investigate the Qurʾan commentaries related to the story of Iblīs that contain the extra-Qurʾanic tales which were later used by Sufis in recasting the figure of Iblīs in a positive way. In general, the Qurʾan commentaries are divided into two main categories. The first category is the orthodox exegesis which, regardless of belonging to either Sunni or Shia jurisprudence, is an exoteric one. The second category is the mystical which is an esoteric one. Although both types of commentaries try to interpret the Qurʾan by using extra-Qurʾanic material, the orthodox exegetes often rely on prophetic Traditions (hadith) and the legends of the prophets literature (*qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*), whereas the esoteric commentators rely on mystical and allegorical interpretations. Scholars such as Ignaz Goldziher believed that the esoteric commentators often use eisegesis, which is one's own idea that is forced onto the Qurʾan and that are often alien or even hostile to orthodox Islamic thought. Goldziher characterized the esoteric interpretation of the Qurʾan as asymmetric to "original, traditional Islam".[7] Others like Paul Nwyia believed that esoteric commentaries, such as the one attributed to the sixth Shia Imam Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765), came out of the synergy between deep mystical experience and the text of the Qurʾan itself. Therefore, the terminology found in these commentaries always described a discourse that remained within the Qurʾanic framework and Sufi exegetes rarely forced their own

[7] Ignaz Goldziher, *Die Richtungen der islamischen Koranauslegung* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1952), 180.

ideas onto the Qurʾanic text.[8] What sets Sufi exegesis apart from all other commentaries is the way its practitioners try to interpret the Qurʾanic verse. While the traditional commentators often use a combination of philological and grammatical tools and rely heavily on hadith and stories of the prophets, the Sufis distinguish the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) from the esoteric (*bāṭin*) levels of meaning. As Kristin Sands suggests, because interpretation is an endless process which depends on individual aptitude and depth of personal experience, the mystical commentaries "are more suggestive than declarative; they are 'allusions' (*ishārāt*) rather than explanations (*tafāsīr*)."[9]

For the purpose of this chapter, six Qurʾan commentaries were chosen which reflect the diversity of opinion about Iblīs from an exegetical perspective. These commentaries belong to a variety of traditions, including Shia, Sunni, Muʿtazila and Sufi. One of the earliest and most comprehensive Qurʾan commentaries (*tafsīr*) belonging to the Sunni tradition is the voluminous work of Muḥammad ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (d. 310/923), titled *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān*. al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr* laid the foundation for the so-called classical period of Qurʾan commentaries and it contains a vast amount of information from the earliest Islamic sources. al-Ṭabarī often provides philological information on the verses, including variant readings, definitions, and etymologies of problematic words, as well as solutions to grammatical difficulties. His comments are based on named or unnamed reciters of the Quran (*qurrāʾ*), grammarians (*naḥwiyyūn*), and evidence from Arab speech patterns and poems. After establishing the basic meaning of the text, al-Ṭabarī addresses intra-textual and extra-textual issues of meaning, noting differences of opinion.[10] The sources that al-Ṭabarī uses to solve these problems of meaning are the Qurʾan itself, hadith, and

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[8] Paul Nwyia, *Exégèse coranique et langage mystique: Nouvel essai sur le lexique technique des mystiques musulmans* (Beirut: Dar el-Machreq, 1970), 123.

[9] Kristin Zahra Sands, *Ṣūfī Commentaries of the Qurʾān in Classical Islam* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 3.

[10] Sands, *Ṣūfī Commentaries of the Qurʾān*, 140.

the exegetical Traditions transmitted by the Companions and followers of the Prophet Muḥammad. al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr* is often referred to as the first and foremost example of "interpretation by transmitted tradition" (*tafsīr bi-al-maʾthūr*) because of the enormous quantity of hadith it cites.[11] The second commentary, titled *al-Kashshāf*, is by Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn Umar al-Zamakhsharī (d. 538/1144), who wrote his exegesis from the Muʿtazila point of view. al-Zamakhsharī is one of the first exegetes to reject the literal reading of the Qurʾan and to emphasize interpretation instead.[12] The third commentary, written by Abū al-Futūḥ Rāzī (d. ca. 552/1157) is *Rauż al-jinān va rūḥ al-jinān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾan*, which was the most comprehensive Shia commentary composed to date. There are also three esoteric or Sufi commentaries used in this chapter. One is *Tafsīr al-Qurʾan al-ʿaẓīm* by Persian Sufi Sahl b. ʿAbd Allāh al-Tustarī (d. ca. 283/896), which is the earliest of the Sufi Qurʾan commentaries. The second is *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt* by the Sufi and theologian ʿAbd al-Karīm b. Hawāzin Abū al-Qāsim al-Qushayrī (d. 465/1072), and the third esoteric commentary is a voluminous work titled *Kashf al-asrār va ʿuddat al-abrār* by Abū al-Fażl Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī (fl. early 5th/12th century). Maybudī explained that after being impressed by the *Tafsīr* of Khʷāja ʿAbd Allāh Ansārī Hiravī (d. 481/1089) he was a bit disappointed by its brevity, and so he set out to expand it. While only two of these six commentaries (Rāzī's and Maybudī's) were written in Persian, nevertheless all the commentators belonged to the Persianate milieu.

According to established exegetical practice, all the commentators followed the standard sequence of Qurʾanic chapters. However, in this study, the discussion will begin with the chapters

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[11] Sands, *Ṣūfī Commentaries of the Qurʾān*, 141.
[12] Sands, *Ṣūfī Commentaries of the Qurʾān*, 111.

that narrate the story of Iblīs in its fullest form, and then progress to those that contain less information.

1.2 The Narrative about Iblīs in the Qurʾan and its Exegeses

In the Qurʾan, aside from the account of his disobedience to God's command, there is little information about who Iblīs really was. According to Q 18:50 he was a jinn created by God from blazing fire. Since these are the only two known facts about Iblīs from the Qurʾan itself, it is imperative to examine the Qurʾan commentaries on this point.

One of the earliest accounts of Iblīs is found in al-Ṭabarī's commentary and many of the accounts about Iblīs which are related in later commentaries, such as *Kashf al-asrār* and *Rauż al-jinān* are taken verbatim from al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr*. In his commentary al-Ṭabarī relates that when God finished whatever He wished to create, He placed Himself on the Throne, and made Iblīs the ruler over the lowest heaven (*samāʾ al-dunyā*).[13] According to Rāzī , at this time Iblīs was one of the angels, and his name was ʿAzāzīl, but he was also known as Ḥāriṯ (the guardian) and his epithet was Abū Kurdūs (father of the cavalries).[14] Rāzī also confirms that according to ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbbās (d. 68/678), the paternal cousin of Prophet Muḥammad and one of the first Qurʾan exegetes, as well as others early Qurʾan exegetes such as ʿAbd Allāh ibn Masʿūd (d. ca. 33/654), Qatāda b. Diʿāma (d. 117/735) and Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq, Iblīs was one of the angels.[15] His abode was

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[13] Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān ʿan taʾwīl āy al-Qurʾān: Tafsīr al-Ṭabarī*, ed.ʿAbd Allāh ibn ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥijr, Markaz al-Buhūth wa al-Dirāsāt al-ʿArabiyya wa al-Islāmiyya, 1422/2001), 1:486.

[14] Rashīd al-Dīn Abū al-Fażl Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār va ʿuddat al-abrār*, ed. ʿAlī Aṣghar Ḥikmat (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tehran, 1339/1950), 1:145.

[15] Abū al-Futūḥ Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī ibn Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad Rāzī al-Khuzāʿī al-Nīsabūrī, *Rauż al-jinān va rauḥ al-janān fī tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, ed. Muḥammad Jaʿfar Yāḥaqqī and Muḥammad Mahdī Nāṣiḥ (Mashhad: Intishārāt-i Āstān-i Quds-i Rażavī, 1377/1999), 1:211.

on earth and he was the most unwavering of all the angels in his knowledge and diligence on God's path.[16] In fact he was the noblest of the angels and his tribe was among the most venerable as he was the chieftain of all the angels of the lowest heaven. al-Ṭabarī also relates that he was the king of the earth and king of the lower heavens.[17]

The commentaries also inform us that Iblīs was from a tribe of angels who were called jinn and they were called jinn because they were the custodians of the Garden (*al-Janna*) and Iblīs was their leader.[18] Apparently Iblīs became haughty and said to himself: "God did not bestow upon me this graces unless He wanted to give me more because I am better than all the angels," but God became aware of this arrogance.[19] In a hadith related by the Prophet, it is said that God created angels and *shayāṭīn* and jinn to demonstrate His dominion (*sulṭānahu*) and His awesomeness (*haybatuhu*).[20] While his name is not directly mentioned in this hadith, Iblīs would appear to fit one of these categories and therefore viewed as the manifestation of God's power and authority.

After Iblīs was banished from heaven, his abode became the islands within the seas and his throne (*ʿarsh*) was the sea itself where his dominion (*salṭana*) and magnificence (*ʿaẓima*) were manifested.[21] No one could see him on land except in the form of an old man in rags who resembled a fearsome outlaw.[22] In Q 17:63 Iblīs is said to have his own army of both foot soldiers and cavalry who are able to overpower humans. al-Ṭabarī indicated that this army was made up of both men and jinn who were at his disposal.[23] He also related that Iblīs was father of all jinn (*abū al-jinn*) in the same way that Adam was the father of all men (*abū al-bashar*) and that *abū al-jinn* was the

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[16] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 1:536.
[17] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 1:537–38.
[18] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 1:537.
[19] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 1:486.
[20] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 3:565.
[21] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 3:567.
[22] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 3:567.
[23] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 14:659.

same as Jānn.[24] According to others, Iblīs was the father of all the *shayāṭīn* (*abū al-shayāṭīn*) and they will all burn in hell except for the *shayṭān* of the Prophet Muḥammad who was converted by him to Islam.[25] According to Maybudī, just as in the case of all men, every jinn had a *shayṭān* who tempted him.[26] In another commentary credited to Saʿīd b. Musayyib (d. 94/715), Iblīs was known as the father of *shayāṭīn* who are both male and female; they reproduced but did not die.[27]

Maybudī argued that in Q 15:27 Jānn was indeed the same as Iblīs who was created from blazing fire. This theory however was refuted by ʿAbd Allāh Ibn ʿAbbās who believed that Jānn was the father of all jinn and Iblīs is the father of all *shayāṭīn* who will never die except when their father dies.[28] Maybudī, on the other hand, relates that Jānn was created from a green-colored fire while Shayṭān was created from the smoke of that fire and angels were created from its light.[29] The fire from which Jānn was made was created from a burning wind and a smokeless fire in which there were lightning bolts that flashed between the heavens and behind a great celestial veil. When God ordered the fire to be created, it tore apart the veil and was guided toward its ordained destination [by God].[30] Ibn ʿAbbās also related that Iblīs was a living being among a group of angels who were called jinn and who were created from fire but that the angels were created from pure light.[31] Rāzī however claimed that Iblīs was called Jānn because he was invisible to the human eye.[32] It was Ibn ʿAbbās who also argued that because Iblīs was ordered to prostrate himself alongside all the angels, he had to be an angel.[33] Hadith narrator Shahr ibn Ḥaushab (d. 110/728)

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[24] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 1:540.
[25] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 1:144.
[26] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 1:145.
[27] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 3:570.
[28] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 5:306–7.
[29] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 1:145.
[30] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 5:307.
[31] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 5:307, 5:703.
[32] Rāzī, *Rauż al-jinān*, 11:322.
[33] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 15:288.

however related that Iblīs was one of the jinn who resided on earth and was captured by the angels and taken to heaven and that he was never one of the angels.[34]

According to most commentators Iblīs was married and had many children. Among his children, Lāqis and Walhān were the companions of men in purity and prayer; Zalnabʿūn was the companion of merchants; Tīr was the companion of men in calamities; al-Aʿwar was the companion of men who engage in usury; Mussawaṭ was the companion of men who spread rumours and baseless reports; and Dāsim was the companion of men who enter a house without a greeting or who forget to mention God's name before eating.[35] All of Iblīs's progeny reproduced like humans. It is reported by Qatāda that God said to Iblīs: "I have not created any children for Adam unless I have created the exact same children for you, and there is no progeny of Adam who does not have a shayṭān as his companion."[36]

According to Rāzī most Muʿtazila believed that Iblīs was one of those rebellious jinn who resided on earth before humans and were later captured and taken to heaven by the army of angels.[37] Unlike angels who did not eat, drink, or marry, Iblīs ate, drank and married.[38] In an interesting anecdote in al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr*, when God created fire for the first time all the angels became terrified. They asked God why he had created the fire and God responded: "I have created it for whoever is disobedient to Me."[39] If, according to the Qurʾan, Iblīs was created from fire then it is not farfetched to assume that it was in Iblīs's nature to torment anyone who was disobedient to God.

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[34] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 5:703.
[35] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 5:703.
[36] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 5:703.
[37] Rāzī, *Rauż al-jinān*, 1:212.
[38] Rāzī, *Rauż al-jinān*, 1:211.
[39] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 1:495.

While none of these mythical biographical descriptions is supported by the Qurʾan, nevertheless they provide an insight into the attitude of the commentators toward Iblīs. All the commentaries are unanimous in claiming that, before his refusal, Iblīs was a high ranking being who served God. The pressing question is what purpose did this positive depiction of the early life of Iblīs serve? In order to answer this question, it will be useful to examine the portrayal of Iblīs in the Qurʾan.

1.3 **Sūrat al-Baqara (Q 2:30–36)**

In this chapter the account of Iblīs is placed within the broader narrative about the creation of Adam. In it, Iblīs plays a minimal role. It is the only place in the Qurʾan where God announces the news of Adam's creation to the angels:

> 30. And [mention], when your Lord said to the angels: "Indeed, I will appoint upon the earth a vicegerent." They said: "Will You place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we hymn Your exaltation and sanctify You?" [God] said: "Indeed, I know that which you do not know. 31. And He taught Adam the names, all of them. Then He showed them to the angels and said: "Inform Me of these names, if you are truthful." 32. They said: "Exalted are You; we have no knowledge except what You have taught us. Indeed, it is You who are the Knowing, the Wise." 33. [God] said: "O Adam, inform them of their names." And when he had informed them of their names, [God] said: "Did I not tell you that I know the unseen of the heavens and the earth? And I know what you reveal and what you have concealed." 34. And [mention] when We said to the angels: "Prostrate yourselves before Adam"; so, they prostrated

themselves, except for Iblīs. He refused and was haughty and was among the unbelievers.

The structure of this story, which represents the primordial creation of Adam, is somewhat different from the other stories of Iblīs in the Qurʾan. Contrary to Bodman's assertion that this account is made up of five smaller accounts in which Iblīs plays a small role, it might be more accurate to think of it as a stage play with three main acts and an epilogue.[40] In the first act, God announces the appointment of Adam as His vicegerent on earth and the angels protest. In the second act, God teaches Adam the names and he put all the angels to shame due to their lack of knowledge about those names. In the third act, God commands all the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam, but Iblīs refuses to obey. The epilogue, which will be discussed at the end of this chapter, is the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden. This is not the only place in which the account of Iblīs's disobedience and its subsequent events resembles a stage play in which Iblīs has a minor role, for in the other Qurʾanic accounts his role is quite prominent. In this Sūra however God is the protagonist, and the angels are antagonists while Adam is merely a bit actor.

Among the seven versions of this story in the Qurʾan, Sūrat al-Baqara is the only place in which God declares his intention to make Adam his vicegerent *(khalīfa)* on earth. Therefore, it is a fitting Sūra with which to begin the discussion of Iblīs's story. Exoterically this story is meant to show that God had a purpose not only in creating Adam, but more importantly, in making him his *khalīfa* on earth, a decision that was apparently beyond the comprehension of the angels. In its singular form, the word *khalīfa* is mentioned only two times in the Qurʾan; once in this chapter and once in Sūra Ṣād (Q 38:26) where God tells David that he was appointed to be the vicegerent

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[40] Withney S. Bodman, *The Poetics of Iblīs: Narrative Theology in the Qurʾan* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), 222.

on earth and then warns him that if, instead of being a just ruler, he follows his own desires he will certainly go astray. It is no coincidence that Sūra Ṣād also contains the tale of the creation of Adam and the story of Iblīs.

There are several ambiguous elements in these verses in Q 2:30–34 that need to be addressed. In Q 2:30 it is not clear whether God's proclamation to make Adam his vicegerent on earth was made after He had created him or before. What baffled the angels, and perhaps also the reader, is the fact that Adam had not yet performed any extraordinary or meritorious deed to deserve such a high honor. After all, by definition, a vicegerent is a person with unquestionable authority who exercises the delegated power on behalf of a supreme sovereign, in this case on behalf of God. Furthermore, the question remains as to what prompted the angels to express their displeasure with God's decision. There is also no indication that the angels were indeed speaking about the progeny of Adam when they argued about the appointment of the one who was going to corrupt the earth and shed blood; rather, they were speaking about Adam himself, even though the classical commentators always insisted otherwise. If Adam, as God's vicegerent on earth, was going to be a force for evil, capable of corrupting the earth and causing bloodshed then by extension angels were making an accusation against God who had made the decision.

At no point did God refute the accusation of the angels against Adam. He only says that He knows something that the angels do not. If God already knew that Adam was going to corrupt the earth and shed blood, then the seeds of evil were planted on earth as soon as God chose him to be his vicegerent. It is important to keep in mind that, at this stage, Iblīs or Shayṭān had not yet appeared on the scene.

The mystery continues in Q 2:32–33. The chronology of events in these verses suggests that God devised an *a posteriori* solution to prove that indeed it was He who knew the very thing

which the angels did not. If Adam knew all the names before God had taught them to him and could present his wisdom to the angels, this could perhaps warrant God's claim: "Indeed, I know that which you do not know." To teach him the names after the angels had remonstrated against the Adam's vicegerency was a trick which the angels could not compete with. It appears that by teaching Adam all the names, which up to that point were unknown to the angels, and by asking the angels whether they knew the names, God did nothing in particular to prove to them that Adam was worthy of becoming His vicegerent. What it did demonstrate was the superiority of God's knowledge and authority and the angels' submissiveness in the face of an obvious deception. God could have taught those names to any other being, including the angels themselves, and that knowledge alone would not have made such a being worthy of becoming God's vicegerent on earth.

There remain some minor but significant issues to discuss regarding the Qurʾanic dialogue between God and the angels. One is the fact that the angels' protestation against God's decision to make Adam His vicegerent did not make them the subject of God's chastisement or banishment. The same, however, was not true of Iblīs. Furthermore, what the angels claimed when they said: "Will you place upon it the one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood, while we declare Your adoration and sanctify You?" was very similar to the dialogue between Iblīs and God in other chapters of the Qurʾan. Here the angels indirectly indicated that they were better than Adam, who according to their predictions was going to shed blood and corrupt the earth. In other words, by claiming to be better than Adam, they could also have been guilty of haughtiness and pride, the cardinal sin which sealed the fate of Iblīs. But instead of outright and incontestable banishment and damnation, God challenged them to prove their worth, a chance that was denied to Iblīs. Moreover, at the end of Q 2:32, God challenged the truthfulness of the angels (*in kuntum ṣādiqīn*)

which became somewhat problematic in view of the fact that in most Qurʾan exegesis angels are portrayed as infallible beings. This also raises the question that if the angels were the perfect models of obedience to God, how they could protest against God's decision. Finally, at the end of Q 2:33, God admonished the angels by warning them that He knows all their thoughts, both revealed and hidden. If what the angels revealed can be interpreted as their objection to the vicegerency of Adam, then what could have been their hidden and secret thoughts? Was it possible that they might have thought that God was making a mistake in making this decision?

The verse that follows immediately after the dialogue between God and the angels contains a reference to Iblīs. In terms of Iblīs's involvement this chapter contains one of the briefest narratives. While in other versions of these events in the Qurʾan, immediately after the refusal of Iblīs, there is a dialogue between Iblīs and God, in this chapter the next verse is about Adam in the Garden and the appearance of Shayṭān. In Q 2:30–36 the reader learns only two facts about Iblīs: that he was not among those who prostrated themselves before Adam and that he was among the unbelievers (*al-kāfirūn*).

As Bodman rightly notes, because this chapter is the first instance in the standard order of Qurʾan chapters in which the story of Iblīs is mentioned, it is natural that most commentators would have provided lengthy commentaries on the nature and character of Iblīs.[41] In al-Ṭabarī's commentary, which contains by far the most complete account of Iblīs, one finds many elements in which Adam's progeny are blamed for all the sins in the world even without the assistance of Iblīs or Shayṭān. When God decided to appoint a vicegerent on earth, the angels asked Him about the qualities of this person. God responded that he is the one who will rule on My behest on the earth and is going to be just in his judgment, but some of his progeny will be the ones who are

[41] Bodman, *Poetics of Iblīs*, 222.

going to corrupt the earth and kill one another and by doing so they will forfeit the privilege of being the vicegerent.[42] As al-Ṭabarī relates, the angels knew that in God's eyes nothing was more heinous than bloodshed and corruption.[43] Interestingly enough, it was not only Iblīs who saw himself as being superior to Adam. Even before Adam's creation, the angels often said to themselves: "God can create whoever He desires but surely whoever He creates will not be better and wiser than us."[44] Because they were proud of their knowledge, God tested them (*ibtilāʾuhum*) and taught Adam all the names.[45] When Adam was created and the angels were told to prostrate themselves before him, they said to themselves: "How come we were not put above him as we are more knowledgeable than he and we were created before him."[46]

In making Adam His vicegerent, God wanted to prove to all the angels that He could bestow his grace upon whomever He wished regardless of how devout or virtuous that being was.[47] al-Ṭabarī relates from several sources that what God meant when He said, "I know that which you do not know," was that He knew about the arrogance of Iblīs which He wanted to reveal to the angels.[48] According to this interpretation, the main reason for the appointment of Adam as vicegerent was to reveal Iblīs's inner thoughts and haughtiness. No matter how negative this might seem, based on this commentary, which was later corroborated by many other commentators, including Maybudī and Rāzī, this shows that God cared about Iblīs's inner thoughts and reaction. Relating from Ibn ʿAbbās, al-Ṭabarī states that God chose a specific group of angels, namely the ones who defeated the earth-dwelling jinns under the command of Iblīs, and told them to prostrate

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[42] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 1:480.
[43] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 1:491.
[44] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 1:493.
[45] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 1:493.
[46] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 1:493.
[47] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 1:486.
[48] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 1:487.

themselves before Adam as a test (*imtiḥān wa ibtilāʾ*).[49] The word "test" (*ibtilāʾ*) found its way into the Sufi lexicon and produced an array of esoteric commentaries about Iblīs in this regard.

In his *Kashf al-asrār,* Maybudī provided further background to the story of Iblīs. He relates that after creating the earth, God created Jānn and his progeny from the smokeless fire, as mentioned in Q 55:15. They dwelled on earth, but because they were lustful creatures who did not follow the law of God, there were much bloodshed and corruption on earth, so God sent Iblīs, who at that time was the chief guardian of paradise (*khāzin-i bihisht*), to earth with a contingent of angels to subdue and banish the children of Jānn to the islands in the sea.[50] Those angels who repelled the children of Jānn later stayed on earth and worshipped God. Iblīs became arrogant and said to himself: "I have worshiped God so much in the heavens and on earth. There is no one better or higher than me."[51] Maybudī relates that after a while God decided to designate a *khalīfa* on earth and when the angels asked what this *khalīfa* and his offspring would be capable of doing on earth, God responded: "Among them there are those who will shed blood, and act with jealousy and corruption."[52] According to Maybudī this was the reason why the angels asked: "Will you place upon it one who causes corruption therein and sheds blood?" because they did not have any prior knowledge about what mankind would do on earth.[53] Maybudī believes that by saying: "We declare Your praise and sanctify You" the angels were not indicating that they were doing God a favor (*minnat*) but rather that it was a sign of their humility.[54] By the same token, God's response, "I know that which you do not know" was a reference to His knowledge about the disobedience

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[49] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 1:486.
[50] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 1:133.
[51] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 1:133.
[52] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 1:134.
[53] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 1:134.
[54] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 1:135.

of Iblīs and the repentance of Adam. In his esoteric Qurʾan commentary *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt*, al-Qushayrī related that God did not refute the angels' claim about the bloodshed and corruption of man on earth because He knew the progeny of Adam would be under the protection of His mercy even if they went astray.[55] In a section dedicated to a commentary from ʿAbd Allāh b. Masʿūd, Maybudī related that the Qurʾanic verse, "I know that which you do not know," referred not to Adam but to Iblīs.[56] According to this narrative, God created Adam by his own hand so that in case Iblīs showed arrogance toward him God could ask him: "Are you showing haughtiness toward the thing that I made by my own hand?"[57] This commentary is significant because it indicates that God created Adam primarily for Iblīs's sake, and his attitude, although portrayed negatively, was a crucial factor in the creation of Adam.

After the body of Adam was created, the angels and Iblīs came to see him and they trembled (*fazaʿū*) at the sight of the body but no one shuddered as intensely as Iblīs. He then returned to the body and when he hit it, it sounded like an empty clay vessel. Iblīs then said to himself: "For what purpose was this created?"[58] He entered into the body of Adam from the front and exited from the back and then said to the angels: "Do not be afraid of this because he is hollow and if we overpower him we can destroy him."[59] It was only after this that God breathed his divine pneuma into Adam. To Maybudī the main reason for the command "prostrate yourselves before Adam" was to show the angels the greatness of Adam's rank and to reveal Iblīs's disobedience. al-Zamakhsharī however had a different and rather esoteric interpretation as to why God asked the angels to

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[55] Abū al-Qāsim ʿAbd al-Karīm b. Hawāzin al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt: Tafīsr al-Qushayrī*, ed. ʿAbd al-Laṭīf Ḥasan ʿAbd al-Raḥmān (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1971), 1:34.

[56] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 1:136.

[57] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 1:136.

[58] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 1:136.

[59] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 1:136.

prostrate themselves. In *al-Kashshāf* he stated that Iblīs was a single jinn standing off to the side and he was overwhelmed by the thousands of angels who were ordered to prostrate themselves before Adam. God's intention in commanding all the angels to prostrate themselves was therefore to single out Iblīs among the thousands of prostrating angels.[60]

What prompted Iblīs to refuse to prostrate himself before Adam has been interpreted differently by the various commentators. To al-Qushayrī the prostration of the angels before Adam was indeed their worship of God through an act of obedience.[61] Yet it seems that this could be interpreted as a form of polytheism (*shirk*) for there is an intermediary between God and the worshipper. al-Qushayrī also believed that Iblīs refused (*ibāʾ*) in his heart and only saw through his carnal soul (*nafs*) that he was greater (*astakbara*). It had already been decreed and acknowledged from primordial time (*qadīm*) that he would be considered among the unbelievers (*kāna min al-kāfirūn*).[62] But there is no clear explanation as to which groups or individuals were considered as unbelievers at that time that Iblīs should be "among them." Was Iblīs the first unbeliever and if so toward whom was his unbelief aimed? Certainly Iblīs could not possibly be an unbeliever toward God and therefore one can logically deduce that his unbelief was aimed at Adam. Rāzī, on the other hand, believed that unbelief came not from wrong action but from the intention of the heart, and therefore, in his heart, Iblīs was not an unbeliever.[63] In his esoteric *Tafsīr*, al-Tustarī related that when God created Adam from clay, He let Adam know that his carnal soul which incites toward evil (*al-nafs al-ammāra bi-al-sūʾ*) would be his worst enemy.[64] This

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[60] Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī (Jār Allāh), *al-Kashshāf ʿan ḥaqāʾiq al-tanzīl wa-ʿuyūn al-aqāwīl fī wujūh al-taʾwīl*, ed. ʿĀdil Aḥmad ʿAbd al-Wujūd and ʿAlī Muḥammad Muʿawwaḍ (Riyadh: Maktabat al-ʿAbīkān, 1418/1998), 1:253.

[61] al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt*, 1:37.

[62] al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt*, 1:37.

[63] Rāzī, *Rauż al-jinān*, 1:212.

[64] Sahl ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān al-ʿaẓīm*, ed. Ṭāhā ʿAbd al-Raʾūf Saʿd and Saʿd Muḥammad Ḥasan ʿAlī (Cairo: Dār al-Ḥaram li al-Turāth, 2004), 91.

interpretation demonstrates that Sufis rarely viewed Iblīs or Shayṭān as the main cause of man's transgressions; rather, it was man's own carnal soul (*nafs*) that was the culprit.

1.4 **Sūrat al-ʿArāf (Q 7:11–18)**

In this chapter, the verses pertaining to Iblīs briefly recount the creation story. The narrative begins in Q 7:11 where God declares the creation of Adam, and the following verses continue in the form of a dialogue between God and Iblīs:

> 11. We have indeed created you, and then given you form. Then We said to the angels, "Prostrate yourselves before Adam"; so, they prostrated themselves, except for Iblīs. He was not among the ones who prostrated themselves. 12. [God] said [to Iblīs]: "What prevented you from prostrating yourself when I commanded you?" [Iblīs] said: "I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay." 13. [God] said: "So descend from it; it is not for you to show superiority in it, so go out; surely you are among the belittled ones. 14. [Iblīs] said: "Give me respite till the day they shall be resurrected. 15. [God] said: "You are among the ones that are given respite." 16. [Iblīs] said: "Because You have led me astray, I shall surely sit in ambush for them on Your straight path. 17. Then I shall come on them from before them and from behind them, from their right and their left; You will not find most of them grateful." 18. [God] said: "Go out from it, disgraced and banished. Those of them that follow you I shall assuredly fill Hell with all of you."

The repetition of the of the word 'said' (*qāla*) at the start of each sentence draws the reader's attention to the dialogue. Although the speaker is not mentioned, it is assumed that the reader is

able to recognize whose turn it is to speak. This dialogue is the result of an action on the part of Iblīs, namely, his refusal to prostrate himself before Adam. The phrase "he was not among those prostrating themselves" at the end of Q 7:11 is also ambiguous and taken together with Q 2:34—"he was one of the unbelievers"— creates a mystery around the character of Iblīs. The verb that is used in describing Iblīs as a *kāfir* is in the past tense (*kāna*). If by the time Adam was created Iblīs was already known to be among those who did not believe then why did God command him to prostrate himself before Adam? In fact, what he was doing in God's presence? On one level, this could be interpreted to mean that before Adam came into the picture, Iblīs was already known to God as a non-conformist individual and that he was an unbeliever who was not among those who prostrated themselves. If that is the case, then one must ask how an unbeliever could remain in God's sight without being punished or exiled. Therefore, one could logically conclude that God saw no opposition to his authority on the part of Iblīs up to the moment when he was commanded to prostrate himself before Adam.

In the dialogue that ensues between God and Iblīs, after Iblīs's rebellious act, it is God who initiates the discussion. This is extremely significant because in Persian mystical literature it is Iblīs who is often portrayed as the one who starts the debate. Here, however, it is God who asks the first question: "What prevented you from prostrating yourself when I commanded you?" The use here of the verb to prevent (*manʿ*) as in other places in the Qurʾan, suggests that perhaps an external factor prevented Iblīs from following God's command.[65] The response that Iblīs gives is somewhat surprising and naïve and does not correspond to how he is portrayed, namely, the great deceiver. However, the fact that he proclaims, "I am better than him. You created me from fire and

[65] Q 2:14, "And who are more unjust than those who prevent the name of God from being mentioned in His mosques and strive toward their destruction."

created him from clay," reveals several interesting yet subtle points. In the Qurʾan the word 'I' (*anā*) is often used by God to refer to Himself. Among the few instances where the word 'I' is not used in reference to God is Q 79:24 where Pharaoh claims to be the highest lord (*anā rabbukum al-aʿlā)* and the other is in the above-mentioned verse where Iblīs proclaims his greatness in comparison to Adam. By using the word 'I' in this context, Iblīs is claiming not only that he is superior to Adam but, more importantly, that he has a divine nature while at the same time admitting that he was created by God.

In His response, God does not refute Iblīs's claim to superiority and only rejects his haughtiness and foolishness in mentioning his pre-eminence in His presence. The command to Iblīs to "descend from it (*fa-aḥbaṭ minhā*)" could be interpreted either as his falling out of grace, falling down from the presence of God/heaven, or simply coming down from the metaphorical high horse of pride, because as God said: "you are among the belittled ones." Before his exile, Iblīs asks for respite from God until the Day of Resurrection and God grants him his request.

In the next verse Iblīs states that because he was led astray by God he is going to sit in ambush for humans on God's path. The root of the verb used in this verse that is usually translated as 'astray' (*ghawī*) could also mean seduced, entrapped, or caused to err. What prompted Iblīs to consider himself cheated, seduced, or misled by God? and why, again, did God not refute Iblīs's claim? It seems that the Qurʾan commentaries provide the answer to these crucial questions.

Maybudī related that the angels prostrated themselves twice before Adam. Once when he was created and the second time when they were informed of the names by Adam.[66] The number of angels who prostrated themselves before Adam varies depending on the commentator. Some said there were only twenty angels while others believed that they were only the angels who resided

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[66] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 3:565.

on earth.[67] Maybudī believed that it was all the angels who prostrated themselves, which shows that they were all in one place and they did so at the same time.[68]

The wording of Q 7:12 where God asks Iblīs, "What prevented you from prostrating yourself?" created a debate among the commentators. al-Ṭabarī pondered the meaning of the word 'prevented you/stopped you' (*manʿaka*), and in a lengthy discussion questioned whether indeed there was something that stopped Iblīs from obeying God's command and he suggested that God genuinely wanted to find out about the hindrance.[69] Then al-Ṭabarī responded to his own question by stating that because Iblīs had been created from fire, it was in his essence (*jauhar*) to seek high position, to be ascending, and not to humble himself before anything lowly.[70]

In response to the question why did omniscient God ask Iblīs about the reason behind his refusal, al-Zamakhsharī stated that, among other things, it was to reveal the pride that Iblīs had about his own origin and the contempt he felt toward Adam.[71] Furthermore Iblīs believed that it was not incumbent upon him to follow God's command because the prostration of a higher being before a lower one was not a just act.[72] According to Maybudī, God knew why Iblīs refused to prostrate himself but, nevertheless, asked him about his refusal in order to reveal Iblīs's antagonism and warn Adam that Iblīs was his enemy.[73] By declaring himself to be better than Adam because he was created from fire while Adam was created from clay, Iblīs was often credited as the first to use analogy (*qiyās*).[74] Yet, as Maybudī explained, his analogy turned out to be wrong

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[67] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 3:565.
[68] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 3:565.
[69] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 10:82–88.
[70] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 10:86.
[71] al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 2:42
[72] al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 2:426.
[73] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 3:566.
[74] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 10:87; Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 3:566.

because clay is more beneficial than fire.[75] For his part, al-Ṭabarī argued that Iblīs claimed to be much older than Adam and therefore he did not prostrate himself before a being that had just recently been created.[76]

God's granting Iblīs a respite despite his disobedience remained a mystery to most commentators. Only al-Qushayrī astutely pointed out that God had conceived a plot (*makr*) against Iblīs in granting his wish.[77] Indeed there are several references in the Qurʾan (Q 3:54, Q 8:30, Q 14:46) in which God declares Himself to be the best of plotters (*khayr al-mākirīn*) and even proclaiming in Q 7:99 that "Did they [people] feel secure from God's plot? But no one should feel secure from God's plotting except the people who lose [at the end]." Sufi commentary appears to confirm my earlier assertion that the whole story was designed as a stage play and that God used this ruse to execute His will.

Although Iblīs asked for respite until the Day of Resurrection, God in fact granted him respite without agreeing on a set date, meaning that the respite could expire at any time God desired.[78] The pressing question is that if God knew about Iblīs's character and his intention to lead Adam's progeny astray then why did He grant him respite? al-Zamakhsharī suggested that this was done as a test (*ibtila'*) for humans.[79]

Abū al-Futūḥ Rāzī offered a rather lengthy discussion as to the exact terms of this deal between God and Iblīs. According to Rāzī, God's intention was so that Iblīs could use the opportunity to do good deeds (*ṣavāb*) and repent (*tauba*), even though there was the possibility

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[75] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 3:566.
[76] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 10:87.
[77] al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt*, 1:326.
[78] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 3:568.
[79] al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 2:427.

that he might never repent.[80] This suggests that God had compassion even toward Iblīs. Then there is the theological issue of whether God accepts and grants the request of an unbeliever (*kāfir*). If one accepts the verdict of the majority of religious jurists that God never grants the request of such individual, then one has to reconsider the true interpretation and application of the word unbeliever in reference to Iblīs. Rāzī however is among the few commentators who believed that for the sake of expediency (*maṣlahat*) God could grant the request of an unbeliever.[81] However, in the case of Iblīs, the question arises as to what was the reason for the expediency? Was there a hidden agreement between God and Iblīs?

After making sure that he was granted respite, Iblīs indicated that: "Now, because (*bi-mā*) You have led me astray, I shall surely sit in ambush for them on Your straight path." The meaning of the word 'because' (*bi-mā*) is the subject of some debate among the Qurʾan commentators. While the word literally means 'by what,' it could be interpreted in other ways as well. Rāzī claimed that there are at least four different readings of the preposition *bi-*. The first reading is 'with,' yielding the meaning "by which You have led me astray" which could be interpreted as "by the same method that You have led me astray I shall do the same to men."[82] The second reading is "because of" or "due to." The third reading is in a form of an oath "Swear on to that by which you led me astray." And finally, the best reading according to Rāzī is to indicate revenge, which could be interpreted as "in retaliation for your deceitfulness against me." While these philological pedantries are more in line with a linguistic reading of the Qurʾan, they nevertheless reveal that the Qurʾan commentators were puzzled by the wording of the story and the various interpretations it yielded.

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[80] Rāzī, *Rauż al-jinān*, 8:142.
[81] Rāzī, *Rauż al-jinān*, 8:143.
[82] Rāzī, *Rauż al-jinān*, 8:143.

Maybudī interpreted Iblīs's claim, "You have led me astray" (*aghwaytanī*), also as meaning "you have wronged me, cursed me, beguiled me and destroyed me." Therefore from Iblīs's point of view it would only be just to do the same to the creature who was the cause of all of his miseries, and to that end he declared his intention and made a promise to God to lead astray all the children of Adam. To al-Zamakhsharī however leading men astray became the undertaking for Iblīs (*taklīfuhu*) because he was not as obedient as the angels.[83] al-Zamakhsharī believed that by misleading Iblīs, God gave him the mandate (*taklīf*) to do the same to humans.[84] In fact al-Zamakhsharī even went as far as to suggest that giving someone a mandate is among the best favors that God could bestow upon a person and misleading men was definitely Iblīs's mandate.[85] Iblīs is reported to have said to God: "You have commanded me to prostrate myself, burdened me with the vanity to transgress against You, and I swear to do the same to men".[86]

Rāzī on the other hand proffered a different interpretation as to why Iblīs believed he had been misled by God. He explained that Iblīs, among other things, was both a determinist (*jabrī*) and a fatalist (*qadarī*), and based on his belief in divine predestination, he assumed that God was capable of beguiling and leading any innocent person astray.[87] Rāzī stated that the phrase "You have led me astray" was an assay (*miḥakk*) of Iblīs even before all of these events took place but no one expected that he would utter these words to God.[88] According to this interpretation, Iblīs believed that he was the only person who had been deceived by God and that he was the only one who would lead humanity astray, and to Rāzī this demonstrated that Iblīs was more upright than

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[83] al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 2:427.
[84] al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 2:428.
[85] al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 2:428.
[86] al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 2:427–28.
[87] Rāzī, *Rauż al-jinān*, 8:144.
[88] Rāzī, *Rauż al-jinān*, 8:144.

many of his followers, namely the *qadarīs* who believed that all evil stemmed from God.[89] In whatever way this interpretation is taken, one has to assume that God was also responsible for leading humans astray, either directly or indirectly, through Iblīs. Rāzī then stated that this was only the exoteric (*ẓāhir*) aspect of the verse and that it was better to leave things that way and not try to make excuses for Iblīs's actions.[90] This admission—that there might be an esoteric interpretation of the verse which could lead to the exoneration of Iblīs—indicates that the idea was not limited to the heterodox fringes of society such as Sufis and that in fact it had even crossed the mind of orthodox commentators such as Rāzī.

That said, taking a closer look at the following verse it becomes clear that God indeed confirmed Iblīs's belief in divine predestination. For instance, in discussing the fighting among the followers of different prophets, Q 2:253 states:

> If God had willed, those [people] succeeding them would not have fought each other after the clear proofs had come to them. But they differed, and some of them believed and some of them disbelieved. And if God had willed, they would not have fought each other, but God does what He wishes.

In Sūrat al-Anʿām there are also several references to the concept of divine determinism. In Q 6:107, in regard to the polytheist, it stated: "But if God had willed, they would not do any polytheistic acts"; while in relation to the heinous act of infanticide, Q 6:137 states: "Had God willed [it otherwise], they would not have done so…"; or when speaking about believing in God Q 6:148 states: "If He [God] had willed, He would have guided you all." The same notion is also

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[89] Rāzī, *Rauż al-jinān*, 8:144.
[90] Rāzī, *Rauż al-jinān*, 8:144.

mentioned in Q 10:99–100, "And had your Lord willed, those on earth would have believed—all of them entirely. And it is not for anyone to believe except by permission of God…" In Q 57:22 it is stated: "No misfortune ever befalls on earth, nor on yourselves but We have inscribed it in the Book, before We make it manifest." Finally there are a host of Qurʾanic verses, including Q 4:88, Q 6:39, Q 6:125, Q 7:186, Q 13:27, and Q 74:31, which clearly indicate that God does as He pleases and could guide or lead whomever He wishes astray. All these verses affirm Iblīs's claim that he was led astray by God in a deterministic fashion and without any particular crime on his part that would justify his eternal banishment and damnation.

Iblīs then explained how he was going to execute this plan: he will come upon men from left and right and front and the back. Maybudī interpreted "from the front" to mean that Iblīs will try to tempt men by worldly means and "from the back" to mean that he will make men forget about the Hereafter. The reason that Iblīs does not mention that he will come from above (*fauq*) is because the up is where God's mercy will descend upon men.[91] Here Iblīs implicitly hints that because it was God who led him astray, he was going to emulate God by sitting in ambush and doing the same to the progeny of Adam. After all, in no place in the Qurʾan, does Iblīs accuse Adam for his downfall, as he holds God solely responsible for leading him astray. As Bodman rightly mentions, by divulging his plan for the children of Adam, Iblīs chose his own future career, and it seems that God tacitly agreed to his choice when He stated: "Those of them that follow you I shall assuredly fill the Hell with all of you."[92] The whole exchange seems like an informal understanding between God and Iblīs in which the latter is given respite in order to ambush and mislead the children of Adam, and the former, instead of rooting out evil at its onset, only threatens

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[91] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 3:569.
[92] Bodman, *Poetics of Iblīs*, 215.

to punish those who follow him. Although Maybudī believes that when Iblīs predicted "You will not find most of them thankful" he did not mean the obedient monotheists but nevertheless according to a hadith related by Ḥasan ibn ʿAlī (d. 50/670), the grandson of the Prophet: "When Adam was misled, he [Iblīs] knew that his children will be much weaker than him [Adam]. Therefore God said 'Verily Iblīs was truthful in his assumption' [that most of them will not be thankful]."[93]

Sūrat al-Ḥijr (Q 15:26–43)

This chapter contains one of the most complete accounts of Iblīs in the Qurʾan. It is again intertwined with the account of the creation of Adam:

> 26. And We created human out of clay from putrid black mud. 27. And We created the Jānn before [that] from scorching fire. 28. And [mention], when your Lord said to the angels: "I will create a man out of clay from putrid black mud. 29. When I have shaped him, and breathed My pneuma in him, fall you down, prostrating yourselves before him." 30. Then the angels prostrated themselves all together. 31. Except Iblīs; he refused to be among those who prostrated themselves. 32. [God] said: "O Iblīs, what is with you that you are not with those who prostrate themselves." 33. [Iblīs] said: "I am not the one to prostrate myself before a man whom You have created out of clay from putrid black mud." 34. [God] said: "Then get out, for indeed, you are expelled. 35. And indeed, upon you is the curse until the Day of Judgment." 36. [Iblīs] said: "My Lord, then give me respite until the Day they are resurrected." 37. [God] said: "Indeed,

[93] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 3:569.

> you are of those who are given respite. 38. Until the Day of the appointed time." 39. [Iblīs] said: "My Lord, because You have led me astray, I will surely make [things] fair-seeming for them on earth, and I will lead them all astray. 40. Except for Your slaves who are sincere."41. [God] said: "This is the straight path to Me. 42. Indeed, My servants—no dominion will you have over them, except those led astray who follow you. 43. And indeed, Hell is the promised place for them all."

The substance from which man was created is the central theme of this particular version of Iblīs's story. It is mentioned three times: twice by God and once by Iblīs that man was created out of clay made from putrid black mud (*ṣalṣālin min ḥamaʾin masnūn*). In none of these cases, is the name of Adam mentioned and instead God uses the word human (*insān*) and man (*bashar*). The substance from which this human was created is also a matter of endless debate among the Qurʾan commentators. There is the word *ṣalṣāl* which is usually translated as clay or clinging clay in reference to hollowness of human body when it was first created. The clay however was made of putrid, stinking or decaying black mud (*ḥamaʾin masnūn*), and this is the only place in the Qurʾan in which this phrase "putrid black mud" is ever used. It is not hard to presume that the repetition of this phrase in such a short account puts the emphasis on the lowliness of the substance from which human was created.

Right after the first instance in which God confirms that man was created from putrid black mud, He states that the Jānn was created before him from blazing fire (*nār al-samūm*). This is not the first instance in which these two creatures are paired together in the Qurʾan as there are more than twenty instances in which jinn and man (*al-jinn wa al-ins*) are mentioned together. However, just as in this chapter, in all other instances the jinn is mentioned first, followed by man, which

indicates that Jānn was created before man. The concept of being first (*awwal*) and primordial (*qadīm*) is a significant theme in Sufism which will be discussed later.

Q 15:28–29 contain the second instance in which God informs the angels about his intention to create man out of putrid black mud which, after shaping him into the form of the human, He breathed His own spirit into it and commanded all the angels to prostrate themselves before this mixture of divine pneuma and scum of the earth. Similar to other instances of the tale, every angel obeyed except Iblīs. The dialogue that ensues in this Sūra however is different from other versions of this account in the Qurʾan. Instead of inquiring in an accusatory tone about what prevented Iblīs from prostrating himself, God asks him: "What is [the matter] with you that you did not become one of the prostrating ones?" The phrase "what is with you (*mā laka*)" also can be translated as what ails you suggesting that perhaps Iblīs had an apprehension about prostrating himself before Adam. Iblīs's response to God's inquiry is also more modest as he does not boast about his superiority to Adam. He simply responds that he was not going to prostrate himself before a man created out of clay from putrid black mud. This is the third time in which the substance from which Adam was created is repeated with the exact same wording. The term that both God and Iblīs use when referring to Adam is also significant. This particular use of the word man (*bashar*) also means the outer layer or skin. By using the world *bashar* instead of *insān*, Iblīs was perhaps implying that this hollow skin that was made of putrid black mud was not worthy of my prostration.

The structure of the following verses which continue is similar to that of the other chapters with one exception. In addition to telling Iblīs that he will be expelled, God also announces that there will be a curse upon him until the Day of Judgment. Iblīs does not protest the curse, nor does he challenge God's decision. This again suggests that Iblīs and God may have had a mutual

understanding about the sequence of events that played out in the following manner: God created Adam from the lowliest of materials and ordered all to prostrate themselves before him; the angels obeyed but Iblīs refused; a dialogue took place between God and Iblīs; God cursed and banished him; Iblīs asked for respite and God granted him his request. This resembles a very well-rehearsed stage play in which only God and Iblīs know and play the roles.

Despite the curse, Iblīs asked for respite until the Day of Judgment. God granted him the respite but set the date until "the Day of the Appointed Time" (*ilā yaumi al-waqti al-maʿlūm*). These three appointed dates have an esoteric significance. Iblīs is accursed until the Day of Judgment (*yaum al-dīn)*, but one reading of this verse is that he is accursed only until the Day of Judgment and after that the curse will be lifted. Iblīs asked for respite, not forever, but only until the Day of Resurrection. The exoteric interpretation is that after that date there will no longer be any reason for Iblīs to lead humanity astray. But then the question arises as to why Iblīs did not ask for a respite forever or even beg for forgiveness altogether. The commentators often pointed to Iblīs's haughtiness as the main reason for his refusal to ask God for forgiveness. Yet in Q 15:36 and 39 Iblīs refers to God as 'My Lord' affirming his subordination and acknowledging that God had supremacy over him. Therefore Iblīs appears to show no sign of arrogance toward God. He also did not object to the curse that was placed upon him; he only asked for respite. By the same token, God did not have any reservation in granting Iblīs his request. This is, once more, an indication that a mutual, albeit secret, understanding or even a mutual agreement existed between God and Iblīs.

The proof of this mutual understanding is contained in Q 15:39–42 in which Iblīs divulged his plan to lead humanity astray except for those who were sincere in their belief. There are two points in Q 15:39 that are significant for understanding the esoteric dimension of God and Iblīs's

relationship. The first is the use of the word 'led astray' (*aghwī*) which occurs twice: first in regard to what God had done to Iblīs, and second in regard to what Iblīs will do to humanity. By using the same word 'led astray,' Iblīs is hinting at the correlation between what God had done to him and what he was going to do to men. In other words, by leading Iblīs astray, God had no other intention except to initiate a process in which all humans would be led astray (save for the sincere ones) by Iblīs. Another indication of this interpretation is in the way which the verse starts. The root of the word Lord (*rabb*) at the beginning of the verse can be conjugated to make other forms such as instructor (*murrabī*) and pedagogy (*tarbiya*), suggesting that perhaps the ability to lead men astray was taught to Iblīs by none other than God Himself. As mentioned earlier, God had never refuted Iblīs's claim that he was led astray by Him.

The second interesting point in Q 15:39 is the method by which Iblīs was going to lead men astray, namely, by "making [things] on earth appear fair (*uzayyinanna lahum fī al-arḍ*)." It is not quite clear what Iblīs was planning to appear fair in order to lead men astray but the word to adorn, or make fair (*zayyana*) is mentioned elsewhere in the Qurʾan as something God has done to unbelievers. In those verses God makes the deeds of unbelievers appear fair in their eyes so that they cannot even recognize good deeds from bad, thereby causing them eventually to end up in Hell. In Q 6:108, God declares that He "makes the deeds of every sect appear fair. Then to their Lord is their return and He will inform them about what they used to do." In many other places, the agent of the action is not clear: "It is made to appear fair to the unbelievers the life of this world (*ḥayātu al-dunyā*)" (Q 2:212), or "The love of that which they desire—of women and sons, heaped-up sums of gold and silver, fine branded horses, and cattle and tilled land—is made to seem fair to people. That is the enjoyment of worldly life, but with God is the best return" (Q 3:14). In these verses it could be both Iblīs and God who are embellishing the material world in order to test the

sincerity of people. Because making things appear fair is something that both God and Iblīs do, one can assume that when Iblīs declared that he was going to do it on earth in order to lead all astray, he was indirectly declaring that in doing so he was acting as God's agent.

In the next verse, Q 15:40, Iblīs's role as God's agent becomes more prominent when Iblīs excludes the sincere slaves of God (*ʿibādaka minhum mukhlasīn*) from being led astray. The most esoteric section comes in Q 15:40 where God confirms Iblīs's claim: "This is the straight path toward Me (*hādhā ṣirātun ʿalayya mustaqīm*)." But who or what is intended by "this"? Exoterically, this could be interpreted as God's confirmation that being sincere is the path toward Him. On the esoteric level, God's statement could be seen as an affirmative response to Iblīs's plan, meaning that by executing his plan, Iblīs had a straight path toward God. To this end, God also reaffirms Iblīs's statement that indeed he does not have any dominion over sincere believers, only those who follow him into error. Could it be that God's "straight path" for Iblīs is accomplishing his duty to separate the sincere from the rest, and that by performing that duty Iblīs will reach God on the straight path?

Finally, in Q 15:42, God confirms Iblīs's assertion that he will have no power over His sincere people with the exception of those who follow him. In this affirmation God also confirms the honesty of Iblīs, and that he should not think he will be able to beguile all of humanity without exception. In Q 15:43 it is also the followers of Iblīs and not Iblīs himself who are given the promise of Hellfire, again raising the question about God and Iblīs's relationship.

Most Qurʾan commentators engage in protracted discussions about the material from which both Jānn and Adam were created. In regard to the creation Adam, the verdict is that of the Qurʾan; that he was indeed created from a stinking and putrid mud and the Jānn was created from blazing fire (*nār al-samūm*). The precise meaning of *samūm* however is not clearly explained in the

commentaries. While most commentators agree that in general it means blazing, they differ as to what exactly such fire consists of. al-Ṭabarī believed that it was the fire that kills and annihilates, while Maybudī opined that it was a smokeless fire that was the cause of lightning.[94] Rāzī, for his part, provided a mystical anecdote to illuminate the nature of this fire. He stated that this fire was like a veil between heaven and earth and whenever God decided to send a torment to earth, this veil was rent and the fire came down like a thunderbolt and burned the guilty person.[95] This could mean that Jānn, like many of the angels, could punish transgressors and therefore he was not a purely evil being. In regard to Iblīs's claims in Q 15:39, al-Zamakhsharī did not agree with the prevalent translation of Iblīs's response to God, "because You have led me astray (*bi-mā aghwaytanī*)," and he instead translated it as "by what you have led me astray" thereby concluding that Iblīs's response was to be understood in the form of an oath.[96]

Maybudī's discussion of Q 15:26–43 is rather short. He pondered the meaning of 'it' in verse Q 15:34: "Then get out of it," and he interpreted it to mean the heavens, Paradise, or even the angelic form. As for Q 15:41, "This is the straight path to Me," Maybudī indicated that this could be interpreted as a threat directed at Iblīs meaning that he will return to God on the straight path.[97]

al-Zamakhsharī believed it became Iblīs's duty to make all the material things in the world appear fair (*zayyana*) in a way that they would distracting humans from the remembrance of God.[98] Iblīs boasted that "As in heaven, where I had the power to make the fruit of the tree to Adam fair-seeming and cause his downfall, on earth I too will have the power to make many things fair-

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[94] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 14:64; Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 5:306.
[95] Rāzī, *Rauż al-jinān*, 14:321.
[96] al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 3:405.
[97] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 5:309.
[98] al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 3:406.

seeming for the children of Adam and cause them to transgress… I will embellish many things on earth for their eyes so that they will love them more than they love the rewards of the afterlife."[99] al-Zamakhsharī stopped short of explaining just how Iblīs had acquired such power over man both in heaven and on earth.

1.5 **Sūra Ṣād (Q 38: 67–85)**

The structure of the story of Iblīs in this Sūra is very similar to that of Sūrat al-Ḥijr and it follows the same pattern of dialogue between God and Iblīs. Many of the dialogues in these two chapters are identical with the exception of two minor but significant changes. Th tale of Iblīs in Sūra Ṣād starts with a mysterious dispute in the exalted council of heaven:

> 67. [O Muḥammad] say: It is tremendous tidings. 68. from which you are turning away. 69. I had no knowledge of the exalted council when they disputed. 70. This alone is revealed to me, that I am only a clear warner. 71. When your Lord said to the angels: "Indeed, I am going to create a human being from clay. 72. So when I have proportioned him and breathed into him of My soul, then fall down to him in prostration." 73. So the angels prostrated themselves entirely together. 74. Except Iblīs; he was haughty, and he was among the unbelievers. 75. [God] said: "O Iblīs, what prevented you from prostrating yourself before that which I created with My own hands? Were you haughty or were you among the exalted ones." 76. [Iblīs] said: "I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay." 77. [God] said: "Then get out of it, for indeed, you are expelled. 78. And indeed, upon you is My curse

[99] al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 3:406.

> until the Day of Judgment." 79. [Iblīs] said: "My Lord, then give me respite until the Day they are resurrected." 80. [God] said: "So indeed, you are of those who are given respite. 81. Until the Day of the appointed time." 82. [Iblīs] said: "By Your magnificence, I will surely lead them all astray. 83. Except, among them, Your sincere slaves." 84. [God] said: "Therefore is the truth, and the truth I say. 85. I will surely fill Hell with you and those of them that follow you all together."

The most significant difference between this and other chapters is the prelude to the generic story of Iblīs. In Q 38:69, the reader is informed that there was an exalted council in heavens (*al-malaʾ al-aʿlā*), in which a dispute took place regarding the creation of Adam. As Bodman mentions, in the Rabbinic tradition, the high council is usually associated with angelic beings who, in the manner of a judicial court, pass judgment on the affair of mortals.[100] Taken together with Q 38:75 where God asks Iblīs "Were you among the exalted ones? *(am kunta min al-ʿāllīn)*," it seems that indeed Iblīs might have been part of this exalted council which disputed the creation of Adam. In Q 37:6–8 there is a reference to the exalted council in which God states that He sends shooting stars against every rebel shayṭān who tries to listen to and take fragments of information from the proceedings of the exalted council. The question is why God asked Iblīs such a binary question: "Were you haughty or were you among the exalted ones?" At first it seems the two might mean the same thing, but one can take them as two separate questions. While in most versions of the story Iblīs is accused of being haughty, this is the only instance where God asks him whether he presumed himself to be a member of the exalted council.

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[100] Bodman, *Poetics of Iblīs*, 175.

Sūra Ṣād is also one of the two instances in which, within the framework of the creation story, the reader is informed that God breathed his divine pneuma into Adam after creating his physical form out of clay. Compared to Sūrat al-Ḥijr, there are however several minute yet significant differences in regard to the story of Iblīs. In Sūra Ṣād, when God asks Iblīs about his refusal, He reminds him that indeed Adam was created by His own hands. This is the only place in all the references to Iblīs in the Qurʾan where God refers to the creation of Adam by His own hands. Aside from the never-ending issue of anthropomorphising God in Islamic theology, this interesting phrase suggests that perhaps Adam was viewed by Iblīs as a hand carved totem or an idol. This, once more, raises the question as to the logical inconsistency of God's demand of the angels and Iblīs. To prostrate oneself before an idol-like creature is equal to polytheism and is the most heinous sin in the Abrahamic religions. In the Hebrew Bible it is one of the Ten Commandments of Moses. In Ex. 20:4–5 it is stated that: "You shall not make for yourself an idol, or any likeness of what is in heaven above or on the earth beneath or in the water under the earth. You shall not worship them or serve them; for I the Lord, your God, am a jealous God." In Q 37:95 when Abraham confronts his father for his idolatry, he asks him: "[How] do you worship that which you have carved out yourself?" Yet in the case of Adam, in a very contradictory command, God demanded that all the angels prostrate themselves before something that resembled a handmade idol. It seems that Iblīs was the only one who recognized the contradiction and refused to bow down before something inferior to God. Also as Bodman rightly noticed, the act of creating by hand, especially given the fact that the material which Adam was created from was putrid clay, suggests an unspoken but imagined act of getting dirty which is not befitting to the magnificent image of God.[101]

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[101] Bodman, *Poetics of Iblīs*, 179.

In Sūra Ṣād, God again asks Iblīs what prevented him from prostrating himself and this suggests that indeed there might have been something that stopped Iblīs from obeying God's command. God then followed his inquiry by asking: "Were you haughty or were you among the exalted ones?" It seems that by saying: "I am better than him. You created me from fire and created him from clay," Iblīs was being sincere and bold in his response. It can also suggest that by this response, Iblīs was hinting that because he was created from better material, God should not expect him to prostrate himself before something lower than Him. God never challenges this assertion of Iblīs's which suggests that indeed Iblīs may have been better than Adam even in God's eyes. But as God asked, was there really something which prevented Iblīs from prostrating himself to Adam? Bodman also believes that Iblīs did not choose to disobey God but he seems to have been prevented from obeying God by an outside factor.[102] The dilemma for Iblīs here could also have been to choose between the lesser of two evils: either to prostrate himself before a hand-carved object resembling an idol (even if it was made by God's hand) or disobeying God's command. He chose the latter and for that he was condemned.

In this particular account there is an Arabic grammatical ending that Persian Sufis and mystics focused on in their discussions of Iblīs. In Q 38:77 when God curses Iblīs, He uses the phrase "My curse (*laʿnatī*) be upon you," which is the only instance in the Qurʾan in which the first-person possessive suffix *ī* is attached to the word curse (*laʿnat*). In this context *ī* ("my") is interpreted by some Sufis as a sign of a great honor that God bestowed upon Iblīs. According to Sufis, one has to be truly exalted to be worthy of God's personal curse. Iblīs's response in Q 38:82 is also unique when he swears "By Your magnificence *(fa-biʿzzatika),*" suggesting that, despite

[102] Bodman, *Poetics of Iblīs*, 182.

being cursed and banished, he felt great reverence for God. It also hints at the fact that Iblīs believed all majesty belonged to God and that he remained humble toward Him.

There is also a mystery regarding Q 38:84 when God stated: "Therefore [this] is the truth and it is the truth I say *(qāla fa-al-ḥaqqu wa al-ḥaqqa aqūlu).*" The interpretation of the word truth in this verse is not easy to discern. This phrase follows after Iblīs's statement regarding his promise to lead men astray except the sincere ones. If this is the truth, then God is confirming that Iblīs is a truthful being. The wording of the phrase makes it possible to mean that Iblīs himself is the truth (*al-ḥaqq*) which gives the verse a very esoteric meaning similar to what the great Sufi Ḥusayn b. Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj stated, in a paradoxical utterance: "I am the Truth."

On the matter of prostration, al-Ṭabarī believed that Iblīs's arrogance and refusal was only directed toward Adam, as Iblīs had never been considered to be a haughty being until that time. [103] In other words, before the creation of Adam, Iblīs never showed any sign of arrogance toward God. According to al-Ṭabarī, God told Iblīs: "I have not seen any sign of haughtiness from you before, but when it came to prostrating yourself before Adam you showed sign of greatness (*taʿẓīmat*)."[104] Iblīs responded: "I have refused to prostrate myself before him because I am better. You created me from fire and him from clay. Fire eats and burns clay. I have done so not because I felt any haughtiness toward You, nor out of any feeling of greatness for myself, but I have done so because I am nobler (*ashraf*) than him."[105]

al-Zamakhsharī even went further to state that Iblīs refused to prostrate himself before any created being and he was only haughty when he was told to prostrate himself before someone other

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[103] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 20:145.
[104] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 20:146.
[105] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 20:146.

than the Creator.[106] The angels also knew that Adam was not worthy of their prostration but they deemed God's command more important and therefore obeyed it.[107] al-Zamakhsharī's interpretation of the phrase, "Then get out of it" in Q 38:77 was also significantly different from that of other commentators. According to his interpretation, because Iblīs was so proud of his own creation, as a punishment, God transformed him into a lower state; he was pure white, beautiful and luminous, but God turned him into a black, unsightly, and gloomy being. al-Zamakhsharī confirmed that, based on Q 38:78, God's curse on Iblīs was to last only until the Day of Judgment and it was applicable only in this world (*dunyā*).[108]

1.6 **Sūrat al-Isrāʾ (Q 17:61–65)**

Sūrat al-Isrāʾ is the only chapter which contains an irregular and peculiar approach to the story of Iblīs in which the roles of the actors have been changed:

> 61. And [mention] when We said to the angels: "Prostrate yourselves before Adam and they prostrated themselves, except for Iblīs." [Iblīs] said: "Shall I prostrate myself before the one You created from clay?" 62. [Iblīs] said: "Do You see this one whom You have honored above me? If You extend my time until the Day of Resurrection, I will surely overwhelm his progeny, except for a few." 63. [God] said: "Go forth, for whoever of them follows you, indeed Hell will be the reward of you all; an ample recompense. 64. And incite whomever you can among them with your voice and assault them with your cavalry and foot soldiers and become a partner in their wealth and their

[106] al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 5:281, 283.
[107] al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 5:282.
[108] al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 5:283.

children and make promise to them." And Satan does not promise them anything except deceit. 65. "Indeed, you have no dominion over My slaves. And sufficient is your Lord as delegator."

There are several anomalies and variations in this version compared to the standard framework of this story in the Qurʾan. The first that is in Q 17:61 where Iblīs, for the first and only time, initiates the dialogue with God without even asking him about the reason for refusing to prostrate himself before Adam. This time he does not even compare his own creation to that of Adam and only mentions Adam's lowliness. The next anomaly is in the sequence of dialogues which are often initiated by the word "he said" at the beginning of each verse. In all other chapters, God and Iblīs take turns in asking questions and responding to them, but in this chapter not only does Iblīs start the conversation but he continues it in the next verse without allowing God to respond. Iblīs's argument in Q 17:61–62 contains a hint of sarcasm when he asks God: "Do You see this one whom You have honored above me?" His tone suggests dismay, derision, and even anger with God's command who told him and others to bow down to "this" lowly creature. This time what he asks God for is not a respite but rather additional time so that he could prove to God that this lowly creature and his progeny are not worthy of such high honour and they could be overwhelmed by Iblīs's cunning. This is also the only place in all the stories about Iblīs in the Qurʾan where Iblīs directly refers to the progeny (*dhurriyat*) of Adam as the target of his plan.

When Iblīs's part of the dialogue is finished, it is God's turn to respond and this is where next anomaly occurs. God not only refrains from dismissing or cursing Iblīs, but it seems that He tacitly welcomes his challenge. Unlike other Qurʾanic accounts, Iblīs does not divulge much about his plans as to how he is going to lead humanity astray. Surprisingly, it is God who provides him with instructions as to how to proceed. Q 17:63 begins with God telling Iblīs "Go forth" (*idhhab*)

which has both an instructive and a commanding tone to it. In other parts of the Qurʾan this phrase is often used when there is a sense of mission or a directive from God is involved. In Q 20:24 and Q 20:42, for instance, God commands Moses to "go forth to Pharaoh" because he transgressed; or in the case of Joseph, in Q 12:93, he instructs his brothers to "go forth" and take his shirt to his father Jacob. In all of these cases the word "go forth" always denotes a sense of mission and instruction and therefore it is not implausible to assume that in the case of Iblīs in this chapter it is no different.

In Q 17:64 God provides Iblīs with a detailed description of the ways in which he could mislead humanity. God states that he can incite them by his voice and attack them with all of his foot soldiers and cavalry. While there are several references in the Qurʾan to the armies of Shayṭān, this is the only place where Iblīs is mentioned to have an army at his disposal. Regardless of whether by the time of his refusal he already had amassed an army, or God, in his omniscience, knew that Iblīs was going to assemble an army in the future, this clearly shows Iblīs's rank as celestial commander. Once again, the reader cannot help but wonder whether there is a mutual agreement between God and Iblīs.

Iblīs is also given a rare privilege by God to become the partner in everything men possess or love, namely, worldly wealth and children. In numerous places in the Qurʾan, these two worldly possessions are deemed a trial on the path to God. Although not directly mentioned in the Qurʾan, this privilege, which is bestowed upon Iblīs, is reminiscent of a similar theme in the story of Job in the Hebrew Bible. In it, it is Satan who wagered God that if he was given dominion over Job's wealth, health, and children, he could turn him from being an obedient and God-fearing servant into an impious and ungrateful person. God accepted Satan's wager and granted him his wish. In Sūrat al-Isrā' however, Iblīs makes no such request of God and yet God freely gives him

partnership in all of man's worldly possessions. Finally, Iblīs is told that he can make promises to humans. In accordance with the standard method of recitation, at this point in the verse, there is an obligatory pause, after which God states that any promise made by Shayṭān is nothing but deception. Up until the pause in the verse, the conversation is in a second person, with God addressing Iblīs directly, but after the pause it is in the third person and addresses the reader. It is reasonable to assume that the section at the end of the verse which states: "And Shayṭān does not promise them anything except deceit" was a general statement and not part of the conversation, thereby implying that the distinction between Iblīs and Shayṭān remains.

In Q 17:65, as in the other stories, God reinstates His declaration that Iblīs will have no dominion over sincere people. There is another obligatory pause in this verse, after which God states that "And sufficient is your Lord as delegator." While, this can be taken as a general statement and is not directly connected to the previous section, there is possibly an esoteric interpretation, namely, that God is reassuring Iblīs that He is the delegator of the affairs of all including those of Iblīs.

In his commentary, al-Ṭabarī indicated that by saying: "I will surely overwhelm his progeny" Iblīs really meant that he was going to seduce, ensnare, and weaken man.[109] al-Zamakhsharī however interpreted the word "overwhelm" as a kind of devastation similar to locusts destroying crops.[110] As for the question how Iblīs knew that he could overcome Adam's progeny, al-Zamakhsharī suggested that based on the creation of Adam he could imagine that this creature would be lustful and therefore easy to seduce.[111]

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[109] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 14:654.
[110] al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 3:529.
[111] al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 3:529.

Being one of the most inquisitive and unapologetic commentators, al-Zamakhsharī asked: "How is it permissible that God can bestow such powers upon Iblīs by which he can seduce and mislead the progeny of Adam. Is not this an incitement to evil and preventing the good?" He reluctantly explained that despite being something evil, it is what God willed and it had to come to pass.[112] After all, according to al-Ṭabarī God even told Iblīs: "There is a reward (*thawāb*) for you if you invite them to transgress against me" and Iblīs was given a free hand in enticing all of mankind to disobey and abandon God and his commandments.[113]

1.7 **Sūrat al-Kahf (Q 18:50)**

Many Sufis and commentators regarded Sūrat al-Kahf as the most esoteric chapter in the Qurʾan, and that went for many of the accounts in it as well. The story of Iblīs in this chapter is one the shortest in the Qurʾan. While it follows the same fretwork and pattern as the previous chapters in terms of Iblīs's refusal it provides neither background to the story nor any dialogue between God and Iblīs:

> 50. And [mention] when We said to the angels: "prostrate yourselves before Adam", and they prostrated themselves, except Iblīs; he was of the jinn and departed from the command of his Lord. Then will you take him and his descendants as friends other than Me while they are enemies to you? How wretched is such exchange for the wrongdoers.

In this tale there is no account of creation of Adam and the background associate with it. If in Sūrat al-Ḥijr it was Iblīs who confirmed that God was indeed his Lord, in Q 18:50 it is God

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[112] al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 3:532.
[113] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 14:656, 658.

who states that He is Iblīs's Lord. This is also the only place in the Qurʾan where Iblīs is mentioned as one of the jinn.

The most esoteric aspect of Q 18:50 comes in the form of the admonition that God gives to all humans. He warns man against replacing God's friendship with that of Iblīs and his progeny and taking them as friends (*auliyāʾ*), which is a terrible exchange for the wrongdoers. The word friend (*walī*) and its plural form *auliyāʾ* has a profound esoteric meaning in the Islamic mystical tradition. It often refers to Sufi saints who are friends of God and are guides to the seekers on the Sufi Path. In this verse, although the word friend is used in relation to Iblīs and his progeny, nevertheless after encountering the word *auliyāʾ* it becomes difficult for the reader to disassociate it from the concept of sainthood. One ponders the possibility that as the true Sufi saint are the friends and guide to the seekers, so are Iblīs and his progeny to those who choose them and thus are given the same privilege to become the *auliyāʾ* and perform their duty, however negative it might be.

As mentioned before, in the same way that God and Iblīs are both responsible for making the worldly pleasures fair-seeming to people, they can both assume the position of the *walī*. This, once more, demonstrate the great rank of Iblīs who, in this context, can assume the same role as God. However, it is God who decides the fate of man and choose who their *walī* becomes. In Q 7:26 after the initial Iblīs story, there is an intriguing reference to the concept of *walī*. In it, God warns: "Indeed, We have appointed the *shayāṭīn* to be the friends (*auliyāʾ*) of those who do not believe." Here, it is no longer the wicked humans who chose the friendship of Iblīs and his progeny including the *shayāṭīn*, but it is God who appoints the *shayāṭīn* to become the friends of unbelievers. This means that Iblīs and his progeny are not free agents in tempting humans and God is the ultimate decision maker when it comes to choosing a *walī*.

There is an odd commentary in al-Ṭabarī's *tafsīr* regarding this particular Sūra. He states that God had said: "The polytheists are envious of their father, Iblīs. He is their teacher; the one whose hubris and haughtiness was upon him when he was ordered to prostrate himself .And their [the polytheists] enmity and envy is similar to that of their father."[114]Therefore according to this interpretation Iblīs not only is a source of emulation for the polytheists but he is also their metaphorical father.

1.8 **Sūra ṬāHā (Q 20:115–117)**

In this chapter there is no dialogue regarding Iblīs's disobedience or his schemes to lead Adam and his children astray. The tale of Iblīs however starts with God declaring his disappointment in Adam in Q20:115.

> 115And We had already made a covenant with Adam before, but he forgot; and We did not find in him resoluteness.116. And [mention] when We said to the angels: "Prostrate yourselves before Adam" and they prostrated themselves except Iblīs; he refused. 117. So We said: "O Adam, indeed this is an enemy to you and to your wife. Therefore, let him not to expel you from the Garden so you would suffer."

The story of Iblīs's disobedience in this chapter starts with a reminder about the covenant (*ʿahd*) that God had with Adam. As Böwering explains, this refers to the events of a day in the pre-existence and primordial time known as the Day of the Covenant in which the entire human race who at that time were conglomerates of nothing more light particles, intuitively bore witness to

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[114] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 15:285.

the Oneness and Lordship of the God.[115] Yet in this Sūra God speaks of two weaknesses in Adam: one is his forgetful nature and the second is his lack of resoluteness (*ʿazm)*. It seems that not only Adam forgot about the covenant but also if he would remember it, he would not have the resoluteness to honor it. This is not the only place in the Qurʾan where humans are scolded by God. There are several instances in which God declares his disillusionment with the mankind. Q 14:34 states: "Man is most unjust and ungrateful"; Q 17:11 states: "And mankind prays for evil"; Q 17:67: "Mankind is ever ungrateful"; Q 17:83 states: "And We bless mankind but he turns away and withdraws aside"; Q 17:100 states: "Mankind has been ever niggardly"; Q 18:54 states: "Mankind is, more than anything, disputatious"; Q 33:72 states: "Indeed mankind is oppressive and ignorant"; Q 96:6 states: "Nay! Indeed mankind is rebellious" and finally in Q 80:17 God who seems to be fed up with His own creation curses mankind: "May mankind be murdered!! How unbelieving he is." In terms of man's creation, Qurʾanic verses are also less than sympathetic. Q 4:28 states: "Mankind was created weak"; Q 16:4 states: "He [God] created man from a [lowly] semen drop, then at once he is an obvious adversary"; Q 21:37 states: "Man was created in haste"; Q 70:19 states: "Man was created fretful"; Q 90:4 states: "Indeed We created man in toil"; and finally Q 95:4–5 states: "We have created mankind in the best stature. Then We brought him down to the lowest of the low." All these verses paint a grim picture of how God viewed mankind. This raises the question that if God viewed mankind so negatively, was Iblīs not justified in refusing to prostrate himself before the prototype of this lowly and transgressing creature? It appears that if Q 20:115–16 are read together, they convey to the reader a sense of sympathy for Iblīs. After all,

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[115] Gerhard Böwering, *The Mystical Vision of Existence in Classical Islam: The Qurʾānic Hermeneutics of the Sūfī Sahl at-Tustarī* (Berlin: Walter De Gruyter, 1980), 148.

how could he bow down to a creature that has no resoluteness and is forgetful which, not incidentally, are the exact qualities which Iblīs excels at?

In the very next verse, there is the familiar structure as other chapters which recount the story of Iblīs's disobedience. However, this chapter is the only place in the Qurʾan where right after the refusal of Iblīs God informs Adam that indeed Iblīs is his enemy who is trying to expel him from the Garden. These two particular verses could be interpreted in a way as to suggest that Iblīs and Shayṭān are the same, but as we shall see later there is an inherent difference between the two.

1.9 Sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ (Q 26:95) and Sūra Sabā (Q 34:20–21)

In the Qurʾan there are two other instances in which Iblīs is mentioned not in the context of creation of Adam but in a different setting. In the first instance in Sūrat al-Shuʿarāʾ (Q 26:95), there is a reference to the gathering of Iblīs's army on the Day of Judgment to be tormented in the Hellfire. While al-Ṭabarī believes that this army consist of both progeny of Adam and Iblīs, the verse indicates that they are the transgressing humans who admit their guilt.[116]

The other instance is in Sūra Sabā (Q 34:20–21), which is about the people of the land of Sheba (*Sabā*) and their ungratefulness toward God. In this chapter, after describing many transgressions of people of Sabā God states:

> 20. And therefore, Iblīs was truthful in his presumption of them, and they followed him, except for a group of the believers. 21. And he [Iblīs] had no authority over them

[116] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 17:599.

> except [it was decreed] that We might make evident he who believes in the Hereafter from he who is in doubt. And your Lord is Watchful over all things.

Classical commentators admit that this is the confirmation of what Iblīs had previously declared in Q 7:17 when he told God: "You will not find most of them thankful."[117] What commentators failed to admit is the significance of the phrase "Iblīs was truthful (*ṣaddaqa*)" in Q 34:20. In it, God clearly states that Iblīs was in fact telling the truth in his presumption about people who follow him. The antonym of this word in Arabic is to lie (*kadhdhaba*) which never appears next to Iblīs's name. In Q 34:21 God once more clearly indicates that Iblīs was given no dominion over them, but it was God's plan to separate the believers from unbelievers and this was done by the agency of the truthful Iblīs. At the end of the Q 34:21, God's emphasis in regard to the fact that nothing is out of His authority reaffirms the fact that Iblīs cannot act as a free agent without the omniscient authority of God.

Further review of Q 34:20 raises an interesting question. What exactly was Iblīs true in his presumption about? The reader is not informed about the details of it, only that people followed him. In the commentary on this verse al-Ṭabarī states that God never approves a liar and never rejects an honest person and therefore, based on this supposition, because Iblīs is truthful and honest therefore he could never be rejected.[118] al-Zamakhsharī believes that Iblīs was just and right in assuming that men are weak against the temptation and this verse is a clear indication that even God approves of his assumption.[119]Once more the reader is left with a puzzling image of a truthful Iblīs which is in direct opposition with what is often portrayed as pure evil.

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[117] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 19:269.
[118] al-Ṭabarī, *Jāmiʿ al-bayān*, 19:270.
[119] al-Zamakhsharī, *al-Kashshāf*, 5:118.

1.10 **Other References to Iblīs in the Commentaries**

There are a few instances in the commentaries where there is a discussion of Iblīs without having any Qurʾanic verses which correspond to the topic. For instance, al-Tustarī in his esoteric commentary provides somewhat bleak yet compassionate account of Iblīs's story. According to him:

> Every person who affirms God's oneness should know for certain that not everyone who loves God (*Ḥaqq*) is loved by Him, for Iblīs encountered Him with the greatest of love and said: Shall I prostrate before one whom You have created from clay [Q 17:61], when You are God, and it is not permissible to worship other than You?' Consequently, God cursed him. Therefore, not all those who try to draw close to God are accepted by Him. Nor does God accept the obedience (*ṭāʿa*) of all who obey Him. Truly He perceives what is in the conscience (*ḍamīr*) [of all His creatures]. Thus, no one can feel secure that God will not deal with him in the same way that He dealt with Iblīs. God cursed him with the lights of His protection (*bi-anwār ʿiṣmatihi*) such that he was always in reality under His curse, but God veiled him from what had been foreordained [for him] from Him, up until the time when He punished him by bringing it to realisation through him. Thus, the person can do nothing except continually [implore] help (*ghauth*) from God.[120]

[120] Sahl ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī: Great Commentaries on the Holy Qurʾān*, trans. Annabel Keeler and Ali Keeler (Amman: Royal Aal al-Bayt Institute for Islamic Thought, 2011), 42.

Here Iblīs is portrayed as the greatest example and a warning for Sufis who due to their piety and good deeds, might become arrogant and consider themselves to be worthy of God's love.

al-Tustarī also sees the fate of Iblīs not in relation to his disobedience but to the primordial knowledge of God. As a mystical commentator, his exegeses on the fate of Iblīs are esoteric. He explains:

> Do you not see how Iblīs, when he refused [to obey] and persisted in that refusal, was forsaken by God due to His prior knowledge about him? This is because He willed from him that which was in accordance with His knowledge; He did not will from him that which was in accordance with His command. However Adam, because he was not forsaken in his abandonment, confessed to his sin after committing it and returned to his Lord, Majestic and Mighty is He, and his repentance was accepted.[121]

al-Qushayrī, another esoteric commentator, indicated that before the creation of Adam "Iblīs was immersed in the fondness of obedience toward God and prided himself in assenting to all of His command. He was convinced about his foremost rank and believed that he deserved to be the chosen one but then suddenly the decree came. As it has been said [in a poem]:

> There was lantern of union which brightened between us
> Then it was blown out by the wind and it was extinguished."[122]

By quoting this poem, al-Qushayrī, despite being a moderate Sufi, demonstrated hidden sympathies toward Iblīs as a lover longing for his beloved. While al-Qushayrī truly believed that Iblīs was the sincerest worshipper of God, at the same time he also warns others that Iblīs's

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[121] al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Tustarī*, 51.
[122] al-Qushayrī, *Laṭā'if al-ishārāt*, 1:37.

"previous obedience did not benefit him and his past reverting [to God] did not elevate him and intercession of no interceder came upon him and no ancient divine favor grasped him, and the lamentation is to no avail for whoever that is struck by the decree."[123]

1.11 **Iblīs or Shayṭān?**

In the classical commentaries of the Qurʾan there is little disagreement that Iblīs and Shaytān are one and the same. The same claim is also made by Awn who uses the name of Iblīs and Shayṭān interchangeably and even erroneously states that it was Iblīs who led Adam and Eve astray and caused their downfall.[124] Others like Alford Welch however believe that the story of Iblīs's refusal to prostrate himself and the story of Shayṭān in the Garden are two separate accounts that were later combined in the process of Qurʾan's revelation.[125] However unlike Iblīs, Shayṭān is never involved or mentioned in the story of creation of Adam as he is only responsible for Adam and Eve's fall.

The original source of the story in which Iblīs (Diabolus/Lucifer) and Shayṭān (Satan) are mentioned interchangeably can be found in several pseudepigraphs composed between the 1st and 3rd centuries CE which are generally about the story of Adam. The closest version of the story to the Qurʾanic account of Iblīs can be found in a Latin work known as *The Life of Adam and Eve (Vita Adae et Evae)*. In chapters 12 to 17 of this book titled "Fall of the Devil," there is a conversation in which Adam asks the Devil (*Diabolus*) why is he persecuting him and his wife and the Devil responds:

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[123] al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt*, 1:37.

[124] Awn, *Satan's Tragedy*, 18.

[125] Alford T Welch, "Pneumatology of Qurʾan: A Study in Phenomenology" (PhD diss. University of Edinburgh, 1969), 26–28.

O Adam, all my enmity, jealousy, and resentment is towards you, since on account of you I was expelled and alienated from my glory, which I had in Heaven in the midst of the angels. On account of you I was cast out upon the earth… On account of you I was cast out from heaven. When you were formed, I was cast out from the face of God and was sent forth from the company of the angels. When God blew into you the breath of life and your countenance and likeness were made in the image of God, Michael led you and made you worship in the sight of God. The Lord God then said: "Behold, Adam, I have made you in our image and likeness." Having gone forth Michael called all the angels saying: "Worship the image of the God, just as the Lord God has commanded." Michael himself worshipped first then he called me and said: "Worship the image of God Jehovah". I answered: "I do not have it within me to worship Adam." When Michael compelled me to worship, I said to him: "Why do you compel me? I will not worship him who is lower and posterior to me. I am prior to that creature. Before he was made, I had already been made. He ought to worship me." Hearing this, other angels who were under me were also unwilling to worship him. Michael said: "Worship the image of God. If you do not worship, the Lord God will grow angry with you." I said: "If he grows angry with me, I will place my seat above the stars of heaven and I will be like the Most High." Then the Lord God grew angry with me and sent me forth with my angels from our glory. On account of you we were expelled from our dwelling into this world and cast out upon the earth. Immediately we were in grief, since we had been despoiled of so much glory. And we grieved to see you in such a great happiness of delights. By a trick I cheated your wife and caused you to be expelled

> through her from the delights of your happiness, just as I had been expelled from my glory.[126]

There are also other slightly different versions of this story written in Greek, Georgian and Armenian pseudepigraphs, and Patristic texts written from about 1st century to the 5th century CE. In one particular version, attributed to the early church father St. John Chrysostom (d. 407 CE) the story goes as follows:

> The angels beheld the likeness and image of God in Adam and they fell down and worshipped him and gave him glory as the likeness of God. But Mastema, which is Sataniel, saw the honour that was given to Adam and he was greatly jealous. He stiffened his neck before the Lord and said unto the angels: "It befits not us to worship Adam, for he is virgin of earth; but we are angels (formed) of flames of fire and honourable, (made) from the elements of fire, while he is dust from the earth." And he desired in his wickedness to lead astray the angels, going in and stiffening his neck before God. But Michael the archangel and all the orders of heaven marvelled at the pride of the Devil (diabolus) and his vainglory and they hardened their hearts against his tyranny beseeching him daily that he would leave his pride and repent and become humble and remain in his honour. But he would not hear them, but he conceived trouble.[127]

In yet another version attributed to St. Peter of Alexandria (d. 311 CE) the account is as follows:

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[126] Gary A. Anderson and Michael E. Stone, eds., *A Synopsis of the Books of Adam and Eve* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1994), 15E–17E English translation of the Latin section.

[127] Walter Ewing Crum, "Texts Attributed to Peter of Alexandria," *Journal of Theological Studies* 4, no. 15 (April 1903): 396–97.

> After the Lord had created Adam, He said unto Sataniel: "Come thou too and worship the work of my hands." And he said, "I will not worship; for there is none greater than I except thee… I too desire to be equal to the demiurge and like him." When God had found in him this wickedness, He caused one of the Cherubim to drag him from the midst of the fiery stones (and) He cast him down upon the earth and with him a multitude of angels besides whom he had deceived.[128]

Here the names Diabolus and Sataniel are uses interchangeably and it seems that the latter was transformed into the former when he refused God's command. The rest of the elements in this account closely resemble that of Qurʾan, although in almost none of the versions of the *Life of Adam and Eve* God directly challenges Diabolus for his disobedience.

In the Qurʾan there are 88 instances where the words with the root *sh-ṭ-n* are repeated while the word Iblīs is mentioned only 11 times. The difference between the two is never mentioned explicitly or implicitly in the Qurʾan, nor do these two names ever appear in the same verse together. While the two words are used similarly in various contexts, from the etymological point of view they are from different origins. Iblīs has its root in Greco-Roman and Hellenistic world and it comes from the world Diabolus which means slanderer or the accuser, while Shayṭān is a Semitic term (taken from the Hebrew word *hā-sātān*) which is usually translated as the adversary. In the Qurʾan the word Shayṭān is mentioned in both plural and singular form whereas the word Iblīs is always used in the singular form and hence while there are legions of *shayāṭīn*, there is only one Iblīs.

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[128] Crum, "Texts Attributed to Peter of Alexandria," 397.

It is also striking that in two of the longest and oldest Qurʾanic chapters with a reference to Iblīs, namely Sūra Ṣād and Sūrat al-Ḥijr, the story of Iblīs is mentioned exclusively without any reference to the story of Shayṭān and the Garden. In fact, in only 3 out of 9 instances (Sūrat al-Baqara; al-Aʿrāf, and ṬāHā) in which the story of creation of Adam and disobedience of Iblīs is mentioned, does the tale immediately continues by relating the account of temptation of Adam and Eve in the Garden by Shayṭān and the eating of the Forbidden Fruit.

After Q 2:34 in which the disobedience of Iblīs is mentioned, the tale continues by relating the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden:

> 35. And We said: "O Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in the Garden and eat therefrom in abundance from wherever you will. But do not approach this tree, lest you be among the wrongdoers." 36. But Shayṭān caused them to slip out of it and removed them from which they had been. And We said: "Go down, as enemies to one another, and you will have upon the earth a place of settlement and provision for a time."

In Q 2:35–36 the details of what transpired between Adam and Shayṭān are not clear, only that the latter caused the downfall of the former. The question is if, as most Qurʾan commentators and scholars claim, Iblīs is the same as Shayṭān then why the sudden name change? After all, only two verses before Q 2:35 it was Iblīs who refused to prostrate himself before Adam, yet in the Garden it is Shayṭān who caused the downfall of the couple.

A slightly different version of this story is recounted in Sūrat al-Aʿrāf (Q 7:18–24), in which God, after chastising Iblīs and banishing him, turns to Adam and tells him what to do. An examination of these verses indicates that there is no interruption between the two events, and it seems that the instructions to Adam and Eve are given to them in the presence of Iblīs:

> 18. [God] said [to Iblīs]: "Go out from it, disgraced and banished. Those of them that follow you I shall assuredly fill Hell with all of you. 19. And O Adam, dwell, you and your wife, in the Garden and eat from wherever you will but do not approach this tree, lest you be among the wrongdoers." 20. But Shayṭān whispered to them to make apparent to them that which was concealed from them of their private parts. He said: "Your Lord did not forbid you this tree except that you become angels or become immortal." 21. And he swore unto them (saying): "Verily! I am a sincere advice-giver unto you." 22. Thus did he lead them on with delusion. And when they tasted of the tree, their shameful parts were manifested to them and they began to hide by heaping some of the leaves of the Garden onto themselves. And their Lord called them: "Did I not forbid you from that tree and tell you [that] indeed Shayṭān is an open enemy to you?" 23. They said: "Our Lord, we have wronged ourselves, and if You do not forgive us and have mercy upon us, we will surely be among the losers." 24. [God] said, "Descend down, being to one another enemies. And for you on the earth is a place of settlement and satisfaction for a time."

Once more it becomes evident that while in Q 7:18 it was Iblīs who was banished by God, in Q 7:20 it is Shayṭān who deceives Adam and Eve. The pressing question is that if Iblīs had been banished from heaven then what was he still doing in the Garden when he tempted Adam and Eve? The Qurʾan is silent about this obvious confusion and therefore most commentators resort to extra-Qurʾanic legends to explain it. Some claim that when Adam and Eve wandered from the Garden they encountered Shayṭān who then deceived them, while others believe that Shayṭān communicated with them from behind the walls of the Garden, and yet others state that Shayṭān

entered into the mouth of the snake and spoke to them through it.[129] However, none of these explanations solves the problem of why Iblīs and Shayṭān are considered to be one and the same. Even in Q 7:21 when God chastised the couple for disobeying His instructions the reference to the enemy is to Shayṭān and not to Iblīs. Furthermore, in none of the Qurʾanic accounts is Shayṭān ever punished for causing the fall of Adam and Eve.

In Q 7:27 and Q 7:30 God warns the progeny of Adam about making the same mistake as their parents and once again the reference is to Shayṭān:

> 27. O children of Adam, let not Shayṭān tempt you as he removed your parents from the Garden, stripping them of their clothing to show them their private parts. Indeed, he sees you, he and his tribe, from where you do not see them. Indeed, We have made the *shayāṭīn* friends and companions to those who do not believe. … 30. A group [of you] He guided, and a group deserved [to be in] error. Indeed, they had taken the *shayāṭīn* as friends instead of God while they thought that they were guided.

The third and final instance in which Shayṭān is introduced as the one responsible for deceiving Adam in Sūra ṬāHā (Q 20:116–122) and follows a similar pattern as Q 2:36 and Q 7:20–24. In all three instances it is Shayṭān and not Iblīs who leads Adam and Eve astray and causes them to fall from grace.

In Maybudī's view, every major prophet had his archenemy: Abraham had Nimrud, Moses had Pharaoh, and Muḥammad had Abū Jahl. Therefore, as the first man, it was only natural for Adam to have his own particular adversary but this adversary was not Iblīs, it was Shayṭān.[130] In

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[129] Rāzī, *Rauż al-jinān*, 8:152.
[130] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 1:144.

one account told by al-Tustarī, after Adam entered the Garden and saw its magnificence he said to himself: "If only we could reside here forever but [alas] that we are moving toward a definite fate and there is an appointed time for us."[131] In a clear departure from the Qurʾanic text, al-Tustarī believed it was Iblīs rather than Shayṭān who approached Adam in the Garden because "Adam's heart was accommodating to the temptation of his carnal soul (*nafs*)." al-Tustarī considered Adam's desire to remain in the Garden forever to be the main reason why Iblīs approached him. Based on this interpretation, the first temptation originated from the Adam's *nafs* and Iblīs only played the role of a catalyst.[132] al-Tustarī even went further in saying that when it came to desire, God had appointed Shayṭān to be a partner in man's *nafs*.[133] As mentioned before, this was also clearly indicated in Q 2:27 where God appointed *shayāṭīn* as the friends and companions of unbelievers.

Beside these three accounts in which Shayṭān is mentioned in the context of the story of Adam and Eve in the Garden, there are many other instances in the Qurʾan where the name of Shayṭān appears. al-Tustarī's idea regarding the friendship of the *shayāṭīn* is also mentioned in Sūrat al-Anʿām (Q 6:112):

> 112. And thus We [i.e., God] have made for every prophet an enemy of *shayāṭīn* from mankind and jinn, making revelation to one another by beguiling speeches in delusion. But if your Lord had willed, they would not have done so, hence leave them and whatever they forge.

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[131] al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, 92.
[132] al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, 92.
[133] al-Tustarī, *Tafsīr al-Qurʾān*, 93.

There are several key points in this verse which reveal the function of Shayṭān beyond the story of the Garden. The first is God's declaration that He is the one who assigns *shayāṭīn* not only to mankind, but to the most beloved of all humans, namely the prophets, who act as their enemies. This verse confirms the controversial issue that God is the originator of evil. In Q 15:40, Iblīs emphasizes that he will lead all men astray save for the sincere men of God and in Q 15:41 God confirms his assertion by stating that "you will not have any dominion over them." Yet in Q 6:112 it is claimed that the *shayāṭīn* are assigned even to the sincerest of all men, namely the prophets, by God Himself. While this affirms the distinction between Shayṭān and Iblīs, it is hardly the only instance in the Qurʾan where Shayṭān is mentioned as the one who overpowers a prophet. In Q 12:42 Shayṭān made Joseph forget God, while in Q 28:15 Shayṭān caused Moses to kill an innocent man, and finally in Q 6:68 as well as in Q 7:200, there are references to the fact that even the Prophet Muḥammad was not immune to the ruses and suggestions of Shayṭān. The Qurʾan even suggests that God uses Shayṭān's temptation as a trial for those who do not believe. Addressing the Prophet Muḥammad in Q 22:52–53 God states that:

> 52.And We did not send before you any messenger or prophet except that whenever he desired, Shayṭān interjected in that desire. But God abrogated that which Shayṭān interjected; then God confirms His signs. And God is Knowing and Wise. 53. So He [God] may make what Shayṭān interjected as a trial for those within whose hearts is disease and those hard of heart…

These apparent differences confirm the hypothesis that while Shayṭān and *shayāṭīn* are appointed by God to all men including the prophets, Iblīs is a self-appointed examiner of the sincerity of humans, and hence is a far more complex character than Shayṭān.

The second point is the fact that these *shayāṭīn* can be either from mankind or the jinn and while different Qurʾan commentators go through lengthy expositions concerning the nature of these *shayāṭīn*, the conclusion is that they could be from either the mankind or the jinn. On the other hand, Iblīs is never mentioned as belonging to mankind nor is it stated that humans could never take the shape of Iblīs. The third and more pressing point is the fact that God unreservedly declares that if He wanted, He could have willed it that none of these *shayāṭīn* would have the power to deceive mankind or the prophets. Hence, not only is God the appointer of the *shayāṭīn*, but in the grand scheme of things He has no problem with the dissemination of evil which befalls both the innocent and the guilty.

While Shayṭān's name appears in the Qurʾan as the conspirer and provocateur who is responsible for a whole host of transgressions against God, including gambling and drinking (Q 5:91), heresy and magic (Q 2:102), acts of indecency (Q 2:268), usury (Q 2:275), and making one forgetful of to remember God (Q 12:41), Iblīs's name is never associated with any transgression. In other word, while Shayṭān is an ever-present menace, the character of Iblīs remains aloof from the day-to-day life of humans. It is also noteworthy that in the Qurʾan, while the hallmark of Iblīs's story is his dialogue with God, neither Shayṭān nor any of the *shayāṭīn* are ever mentioned to have the privilege of conversing with God.

Despite his evil nature, Shayṭān is not portrayed in the Qurʾan as a completely bleak character, as there are a few verses which depict him as a semi-positive being, capable of believing in and seeing the truth. For instance, in reference to the unbelievers who go to battle against the believers, Q 8:48 states:

> And when Shayṭān made their deeds pleasing to them [i.e., unbelievers] he [i.e., Satan] said [to unbelievers]: "No one can defeat you today from among the people, and indeed,

> I am your protector." But when the two armies sighted each other, he turned on his heels and said: "Indeed, I am guiltless of you [your sin]. Indeed, I see what you do not see; indeed, I fear God." And God is severe in punishment.

In a similar vein, in Q 59:16 God provides examples of unbelievers as follows:

> Like the example of Shayṭān when he says to man: "Do not believe [in God]." But when [man] does so [i.e., follow Shayṭān's advice], [Shayṭān] says: "Indeed, I am guiltless of you [your sin]. Indeed, I fear Allah, Lord of the worlds."

Q 14:22 provides even more convincing evidence that Shayṭān was merely an agent in God's grand scheme. In a speech on the Day of Judgment, Shayṭān admonishes those who followed him:

> And Shayṭān will say when the matter has been decided [on the Day of Judgment]: "Indeed, God had promised you the promise of truth. And I promised you, but I betrayed you. But I had no authority over you except that I invited you, and you obeyed me. So do not blame me; but blame yourselves. I cannot be called to your aid, nor can you be called to my aid. Indeed, I reject your former act in associating me as a partner with God." Indeed, for the wrongdoers there is a painful punishment.

In all these instances Shayṭān demonstrates unquestionable reverence and fear toward God which, not incidentally, is the required trait of every true believer. Shayṭān is portrayed as a monotheist who disassociates himself from all acts of polytheism (*shirk*) and furthermore he clearly declares that he is only one who invites to sin. Therefore, in light of these verses, it seems that Shayṭān's God-fearing trait is at odds with the common assumption that he is a purely evil being and an antagonistic force toward God.

If he is not pure evil, then what is the function and role of Shayṭān? At least in two Qurʾanic verses there is indication that, like angels who come down to the believers, God also sends down Shayṭān to unbelievers as a retribution for their transgressions. In Q 19:83 God tells Prophet Muḥammad: "Do you not see that We have sent the *shayāṭīn* upon the unbelievers, to confound them with confusion." The same idea is also suggested in Q 26:221–22 where God states: "Shall I inform you upon whom the *shayāṭīn* descend? They descend upon every sinful, false person." In the Qurʾan, both phrases, "We sent upon (*arsalnā*)" and "descend upon (*nazzala*)," are often used to describe the descent of God's revelations to the prophets or in reference to the descent of the angels to pious people. Its usage in relation to *shayāṭīn* suggests that Shayṭān's role cannot be reduced to a merely malevolent being, as it appears that he and his minions are active agents, executing God's will. To that end they can even serve any humans that God chooses. For instance, in Q 21:82 and Q 38:37–39 there are references to number of *shayāṭīn* who were enslaved by Solomon and did heavy labor for him including diving for pearls and building his palace. At the bequest of God their fate was in hands of Solomon. It could be further suggested that the role of Shayṭān was as a divine punisher. For example, in Q 2:275 it is stated that: "Those who consume [the money from] usury cannot stand [on the Day of Resurrection] except as one standing who is being beaten by the Shayṭān into insanity."

There seems to be another reason as to why Shayṭān might be considered an agent of God and that is found in two contradictory verses in Sūrat al-Baqara. In Q 2:30, God proclaims the vicegerency of Adam on earth, yet in Q 2:35–36 Adam and Eve are placed in the Garden and succumb to the temptation of Shayṭān and are banished to earth. Based on these verses, it seems obvious that God, who in Q 3:54 and Q 8:30, calls Himself the best plotter (*khayr al-mākirīn*), designed a ruse, so that Adam might fulfill the ultimate purpose of his creation, namely to be God's

vicegerent on earth. To this end an agent, namely the Shayṭān, was allowed to act as a buffer to speed the process of Adam's fall. The only commentator who does not shy away from inquiring about this obvious contradiction is the esoteric exegete al-Qushayrī. He asks, "If God had declared that he was going to appoint a vicegerent on earth, even before Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden, then the decision had been made long before Shayṭān caused Adam's fall. God knew well that Adam could not resist temptation and was bound to listen to the whispering of Shayṭān and eat from the Forbidden Tree."[134] Adam was never meant to remain in the Garden forever, as he was assigned to be God's vicegerent on earth and not in the Garden. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to assume that Shayṭān was clearly acting as the direct agent of God's will.

1.12 **Conclusion**

Upon examination of the roles of the actors in the story of Iblīs, it becomes clear that God is the protagonist while Iblīs is the antagonist. Adam and the angels have minor roles in all the Qurʾanic chapters pertaining to the story of Iblīs with the exception of Sūrat al-Baqara in which the angels challenge God's decision. Almost all commentators agreed that the entire story regarding the creation of Adam and God's command to the angels to prostrate themselves before him was a setup to single out Iblīs as the disobedient one. If this premise is correct, then that only shows how great Iblīs's rank must have been that God had to go through such an elaborate stage play to single out one among many.

The story of the creation of Adam also represents a contradiction, both in the way in which he was created and in the way in which God demanded that the angels prostrate themselves before

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[134] al-Qushayrī, *Laṭāʾif al-ishārāt*, 1:38.

him. Whereas Iblīs was created only from one substance, namely fire, Adam was created from two different components; his physical form was created from the stinking mud shaped into clay and his soul from the Divine pneuma. Therefore, where there is uniformity in the essence of Iblīs, Adam's foundation is of multiplicity. The Qurʾan repeatedly mentions that humans were created from lowly semen, and later were given a physical form and when they die, they would go back to the state of multiplicity where the soul and body are separated until the Day of Resurrection. The same is never said in the Qurʾan or its commentaries about Iblīs. He was created from fire and, at least on two occasions, the Qurʾan mentions that in the end, he will be cast into Hellfire (*nār*). Unlike Adam, in the case of Iblīs there is a sense of permanency and integrity to both his physical and spiritual form from the beginning until the end.

The second dilemma can be seen in God's command to the angels and Iblīs to prostrate themselves before Adam. In general, in the Near Eastern customs and specifically within the Abrahamic religious tradition the act of prostration signifies two things: first it is symbol of submission toward a king and second and more significantly it is an act of worship toward God. Among the Qurʾan commentators there is endless debate about the nature of God's command to the angels and Iblīs when He demanded that they prostrate themselves before Adam. Many believed that because the act of prostration (*sujūd*) in general was an act of worship which was reserved solely for God, performing such act could only be interpreted as a gesture of humiliation of all the angels before Adam and not as an act of worship. Others stated that it was God before whom the angels were prostrating themselves and Adam was only standing in the same direction as God. Abū al-Futūḥ Rāzī however mentioned an interesting point which to some extent invalidated most of these arguments. He indicated that in the Qurʾan, when preceding or following the word Lord or God, the verb 'to prostrate (*sajada*)' is always used with the preposition 'to'

(*li*).[135] In the case of the angels who were prostrating themselves before Adam, in all Qurʾanic instances the same formula 'to Adam (*li-ādam*)' is also applied, which can only denote that the act of prostration was solely to Adam and no one else.[136] Furthermore, whenever this formula is used in the Qurʾan, the prostration could only be interpreted to indicate an act of worship and not simply a sign of humiliation or deference toward Adam which all Qurʾan commentators wrongly insinuate. Rāzī believed that the act of prostration was the best form of veneration and if there had been a better form, God would have commanded it. [137]

There was also a difference between what the angels did and what Iblīs did following the event of Adam's creation. When God announced that he was going to appoint a vicegerent on earth, all the angels protested, but it seems, as the Qurʾan suggests, Iblīs was prevented from doing so. Whereas the angels were concerned about the corruption and bloodshed that Adam's progeny would cause on earth, there is no indication that Iblīs shared their concern. It seems Iblīs's real concern was having to prostrate himself before so lowly a creature or for that matter for any created being other than God. The whole encounter also seems incompatible with other parts of Qurʾan, specifically two particular verses. The first is Q 51:56 where God states: "I have not created the jinn and mankind except to worship me." Based on this verse the only duty of both man and jinn is to perform the act of worship to God and to God alone, the gesture of prostration being the outward sign of such worship. The second verse is Q 4:116, in which God states: "Indeed God does not forgive [the sin] of worshipping others beside Him but apart from that He forgives everything else for whomever He so desires." As in Judaism, in Islam the most heinous

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[135] Rāzī, *Rauż al-jinān*, 1:210.
[136] Rāzī, *Rauż al-jinān*, 1:210.
[137] Rāzī, *Rauż al-jinān*, 1:211.

transgression against God is worshipping another deity or idol beside God. Therefore based on these two verses, Iblīs did not commit any major sin, and as it was his duty not to prostrate himself before any other being besides God, he even showed his true monotheistic conviction. Yet while all the angels, who at first complained, obeyed the obviously confusing command of God and therefore were spared, Iblīs's fate, because of his disobedience, was worse than that of Adam who, although he disobeyed God's instruction, was forgiven.

There remain a number of nagging questions in regard to the contradiction in the tale. First, Iblīs's reasoning for refusing to prostrate himself before Adam does not fit the way in which he is often depicted in commentaries. Most commentators claim that the only reason why God ordered all the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam was that only God knew that Iblīs was a hypocrite in his heart, and He wished to expose his hypocrisy. Since religious hypocrisy is about only pretending to be obedient and pious, if Iblīs had truly been a hypocrite he could have pretended to obey God's command like all other angels and plot against Adam in secret instead of openly challenging God. Therefore, Iblīs could not have been a hypocrite. After all, if before the creation of Adam, Iblīs was so diabolical, proud, and hypocritical, what was he doing in the presence of God and among the angels?

If Iblīs was not a hypocrite, then what does it mean to be an unbeliever (*kāfir*) as the Qurʾan often refers to him? As mentioned before, the word unbeliever, in the context of Iblīs's story, does not necessarily mean one who does not believe in God. Iblīs had served God, had the privilege of personal dialogue with Him and called God his Lord on several occasions even after he learned about his gloomy fate. Thus, one has to translate and interpret his unbelief not toward God but toward Adam. But based on all the aforementioned negative verses in the Qurʾan against mankind, is Iblīs to be blamed for not believing in Adam and his progeny? After all, by his own admission,

which was confirmed by God, he still believed that he would not have power over sincere believers which indicates that not only was he not proud but that he was fully aware of his own limitations.

At best Iblīs's transgression, if one can even call it that, was disobedience to God's command and his retort to God. But this also seems at odds with Iblīs's character. Iblīs is always depicted by theologians, commentators, and even Sufis as a shrewd strategist, yet for all of his supposed shrewdness and cunning, his reasoning as to why he did not prostrate himself before Adam seems quite simplistic and naïve, which makes the entire story very plausible. And what about the phrase that Iblīs uttered when he told God: "because You have led me astray," a statement that was never refuted by God. Was there a secret agreement between God and Iblīs where the former did not honor such an agreement and tricked the latter, therefore Iblīs blamed God for leading him astray? After all, in the Qurʾan, God repeatedly refers to Himself as "the best plotter (*khayr al-mākirīn*)" who can counter any trick with a better one. Or was all of this a ruse set up like a pre-rehearsed stage play that only God and Iblīs knew about and each played his role so well that all the angels and Adam believed them. As shown in Sūrat al-Kahf it seems that Iblīs was an agent instructed by God to do whatever he could to lead humanity astray.

These sorts of questions led to a controversial path that the theologians and orthodox Islamic scholars dared not tread. As it will be demonstrated in the next chapters, the burden of unraveling these questions fell on the Sufis who often turned the entire narrative on its head.

Chapter 2

The Devil in Zoroastrian Literature

This chapter examines the portrayal of the Devil in Zoroastrianism and explores possible connections with his Sufi counterpart. Since Zoroastrianism is one of the oldest creeds in existence, the history of its demonology spans almost three millennia. The task at hand is to examine the evolution of the character of the Avestan devil known as Angra Mainyu, from its earliest origins in the book of *Gāthās* to his metamorphosis as Ahriman in the Middle Persian (Pahlavi) and New Persian Zoroastrian sources. By examining this evolution, this chapter will also look at any possible influence that Zoroastrianism might have had on Sufism with respect to the Devil. What will not be discussed in this chapter is the multifaceted Zoroastrian demonology or its mundane notion of evil which is often related to the issue of ritual impurity.

2.1 The Devil in the Old Avestan Text

Before delving into the issue of the Devil in the Avesta, it is important to briefly explain the difference between Old and Young Avestan text. Avesta is the name that Zoroastrianism gives to the collection of its sacred texts. It is divided into old and young parts. According to most recent scholarly estimates, based on the language and contents, it is likely that the Old Avesta attained its final form by about 1000 BCE and the Young Avesta before the Achaemenid period, perhaps during the Median period (ca. 700–550 BCE).[138] The Old Avesta, which was composed in a

[138] Prods Oktor Skjærvø, ed. and trans., *The Spirit of Zoroastrianism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 2.

language more archaic than the rest of the Avesta, is comprised of the *Yasna Haptanghāiti* (*Yasna in Seven Sections*), as well as the *Gāthās*, which is in metrical form and believed to have been composed by the prophet Zoroaster himself. The Young Avesta is comprised of several books including the *Yašts*, the *Visprad,* the *Khorda Avestā,* the *Vidēvdād* as well as the rest of the *Yasna*.

It is difficult to identify the precise notion of the Devil as an individual entity in the *Gāthā*s. In the dualistic worldview portrayed in the *Gāthās*, evil entities such as Lie (Druj), Evil Spirit (Angra Mainyu), Evil Spirit (Aka Mainyu), and Evil Thought (Aka Manah) represent both a conceptual and abstract notion as well as a real and unique entity, similar to that of Iblīs or Satan in the Abrahamic tradition. These entities are in direct oppositions to the beneficent or Ahuraic forces led by the supreme deity Ahura Mazdā. As Gherardo Gnoli rightly indicates, the dualism mentioned in the *Gāthā*s is essentially philosophical and different from the ontological dualism in which two coexisting entities are opposed by their innate natures, rather than by choice.[139]

While in the *Gāthās* the name of Angra Mainyu is mentioned only once, the word is not attested in Old Persian.[140] In the Old Avestan text, the Zoroastrian supreme god Ahura Mazdā is part of group of divine entities called "Ahuras," who are the antagonists of the demonic forces, or the *daēvas*; but among the latter there is no individual antagonist directly opposing Ahura Mazdā, such as the Evil Spirit (Angra Mainyu) often mentioned in the Young Avestan texts.[141] Instead, in the *Gāthā*s, there are references to two spirits: an Evil Spirit (Angra Mainyu) who stands in opposition to the Beneficent Spirit (Spenta Mainyu).[142] As the *Gāthās* suggest, these two spirits existed from the beginning:

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[139] *Encyclopædia Iranica*, s.v. "Dualism."
[140] *Encyclopædia Iranica*, s.v. "Ahriman."
[141] Helmut Humbach and Pallan Ichaporia, ed. and trans., *The Heritage of Zarathushtra: A New Translation of His Gāthās* (Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag C. Winter, 1994), 12.
[142] Humbach and Ichaporia, *Heritage of Zarathushtra*, 30.

> 30:3. These are the two spirits (existing) in the beginning, twins who have been heard of as the two dreams, the two thoughts, the two words, and the two actions, the better and the evil. Between these two, the munificent discriminate rightly but not those who give bad gifts. 30:4. When these two spirits confront each other (to fight for a person, then that person) determines (his) first (existence), (with) vitality or lack of vitality, and how his existence will be in the end. (The existence) of the deceitful will be very bad, but best thought will be (in store) for the truthful one. 30:5. Of these two spirits the deceitful one chooses to do the worst things, but the most holy spirit clothed in the hardest stones, (chooses) truth, (as do those) who, with true actions, devotedly gratify Mazdā Ahura. 30:6. The *daēva*s do not at all rightly discriminate between these two spirits, for as they take counsel with each other delusion comes over them, so that they choose the worst thought. In that way, they all run to meet wrath, by which the mortals sicken existence.[143]

In the *Gāthā*s, it seems both of these spirits are active agents in the primeval choice of man between good and evil, while God, Ahura Mazdā, stands as the grand judge. In turn, both of these spirits have their own deputies who do their bidding: Druj is the active agent of Angra Mainyu who tries to corrupt and destroy all the good that is created by Ahura Mazdā and preserved by the Beneficent Spirit. The *daēva*s in turn are all from the seed of the Evil Spirit and they are instructed by him to lead all creation, including humans, astray from the path of Aša (Order/Righteousness).[144] In fact, throughout the *Gāthā*s the battle is often played out between the deceitful ones, or the followers

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[143] Humbach and Ichaporia, *Heritage of Zarathushtra*, 30.
[144] Humbach and Ichaporia, *Heritage of Zarathushtra*, 41.

of Druj, and the righteous ones, or the followers of Aša with little interference from any devil-like entity.

Prods Oktor Skjaervo believes that in *Gāthā* 30:6 there is a clear indication that *daēva*s were divine beings who lost their divine status when they were tricked by Angra Mainyu and chose the evil path:[145]

> You (Daēvas) cheat the mortals of good life and immortality in the same way as both the evil spirit, (associated) with evil thought, (cheated) you, the Daēvas, and the action (inspired) by evil word, by which a ruler recognizes a deceitful person.[146]

This scenario very much resembles the fall of Iblīs/Sataniel in the Abrahamic tradition. There has been a debate over the origins of the *daēvas* in the Avestan text. In the early Indo-Iranian tradition, the name *daevā* was synonymous with a divine being or god which translates as 'the shining one'.[147] However, over time, with the reformulation of the Ahuraic beings, these *daēvas* were demoted to the rank of 'false gods' and later they synonymous with the demonic forces.[148]

The name Angra Mainyu is mentioned only once in the *Gāthās* (45:2) in relation to the Beneficent Spirit:

> Now I shall proclaim the two spirits in the first (stage) of existence, of whom the Holy One [Spenta Mainyu] shall address the Harmful One [Angra Mainyu] as follows:

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[145] Skjærvø, *Spirit of Zoroastrianism*, 20.
[146] Humbach and Ichaporia, *Heritage of Zarathushtra*, 41.
[147] Mary Boyce, *History of Zoroastrianism*, vol. 1, *The Early Period* (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1975), 23.
[148] Mary Boyce, *History of Zoroastrianism*, 1:86.

> "Neither our thoughts nor pronouncements, neither intellects nor choices, neither utterances nor actions nor religious views, nor our souls are in agreement."[149]

This and verses similar to this became the basis for the notion of dualism in Zoroastrianism. Gnoli interprets *Gāthā* 30:3 in which Zoroaster became aware of the two spirits as follows: "The two primeval Spirits who are twins were revealed [to me] in sleep. Their ways of thinking, speaking, and behaving are two: the good and the evil."[150] Gnoli stipulates that while the interpretation of this passage is uncertain, this verse is, without doubt, fundamental in understanding the notion of dualism.[151] Antonio Panaino even goes further and suggests that, despite the difficulty in interpreting the Avestan text, there is a possibility that Ahura Mazdā indeed could be the father of both spirits.[152] This could be based on the fact that Ahura Mazdā is the father of the Beneficent Spirit, and since the two spirits are twins, by extension this makes Ahura Mazdā the father of the Evil Spirit as well.[153] As Gnoli indicates, Mary Boyce's interpretation that the concept of twinship was used as a metaphor for "the equality in state of the two unrelated beings, and their coevity" is unconvincing.[154] Yet it should also be assumed that the Evil Spirit only became evil after choosing wickedness over righteousness. As Ilya Gershevitch rightly noticed, the notion of twinship gained meaning only after the two undifferentiated spirits were faced with the choice between good and evil.[155] He also suggests that the *Gāthās* report no struggle, or even bitterness, between the two Spirits, but only hint at a

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[149] Humbach and Ichaporia, *Heritage of Zarathushtra*, 72.
[150] *Encyclopædia Iranica*, s.v. "Dualism."
[151] *Encyclopædia Iranica*, s.v. "Dualism."
[152] Antonio Panaino, Cosmologies and Astrology," in *The Wiley Blackwell Companion to Zoroastrianism*, ed. Michael Stausberg and Yuhan Sohrab-Dinshaw Vevaina (Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley, 2015), 236.
[153] Humbach and Ichaporia, *Heritage of Zarathushtra*, 83.
[154] *Encyclopædia Iranica*, s.v. "Dualism."
[155] Ilya Gershevitch, "Zoroaster's Own Contribution," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 23, no. 1 (1964): 13.

struggle to come.[156] Although in conformity with their common origin, both Spirits are seen in *Gāthā* 30:4 as having the power of creation, Spenta Mainyu only acts as Ahura Mazdā's creative agent. He is frequently mentioned in the *Gāthās* in this role, while Angra Mainyu receives no further attention.[157] It is also of paramount importance to remember that dualism in the *Gāthās* was entirely a spiritual notion and not based on the opposition of spiritual versus material worlds.

The language of the *Gāthās* is mysterious. It has been maintained that the text itself is very difficult to decipher from a linguistic point of view, and it seems that scholars have yet to come to a consensus on the meaning of many phrases. Even on the issues where there is agreement among scholars, the meaning of the text remains open to interpretation. The issue of the Devil in the *Gāthās* is no exception. It seems that if one has to pinpoint one individual entity as the personification of the Devil, even in its most abstract Gāthic form, it must be the demoness Druj, which in its various forms is mentioned more than any other devilish being in the *Gāthā*s. The corresponding verbal root of the word Druj in Indic seems to suggest the meaning 'to blacken'.[158] In the Avesta, Druj is interpreted as 'lie,' 'falsehood,' and also 'chaos,' the material and conceptual counterpart of the 'truth' and 'order' represented by Aša. Druj is attested eighteen times in the Old Avesta, often as an opposing force to Aša.[159] As a demoness, Druj has her own followers who freely choose her over Aša, and at the end of time she will be defeated and delivered into the hands of Aša to face justice.[160] As *Gāthā* 31:1 states, Druj is the adversary of Aša and the direct opponent of Ahura Mazdā.[161]

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[156] Gershevitch, "Zoroaster's Own Contribution,"13.
[157] Gershevitch, "Zoroaster's Own Contribution," 13.
[158] *Encyclopædia Iranica*, s.v. "Druj."
[159] *Encyclopædia Iranica*, s.v. "Druj."
[160] Humbach and Ichaporia, *Heritage of Zarathushtra*, 31–33.
[161] Humbach and Ichaporia, *Heritage of Zarathushtra*, 35.

In *Gāthā* 32:3 there is a mention of a "great person" who worships the *daēvas* without providing any information about who that person might be:

> But all you *daēva*s are seed of evil thought, as is the "great" person worshipping you, as well as the actions of deceit and contempt, for which again and again you have become notorious in the seventh clime of the Earth.[162]

The same section of *Gāthās* verse 11 speaks of a lord and ladies who seem to be worshippers of Druj and who, by the merit of their "great deeds," stand apart from the rest of the community:

> Indeed, those deceitful 'ladies and lords' spoil (our) livelihood, who 'distinguish' themselves with 'great deeds': robbing (people) of the possession of their heritage - and who rip the truthful away from best thought, O Mazda.[163]

The *Gāthās* do not elaborate on who these 'lord and 'ladies' were and what 'great deed' distinguished them. However, suffice it to say that this suggests that worship of the *daēvas* might have been prevalent in the milieu in which the *Gāthās* were first composed.

Druj was sometimes thought to be an intimate and inner presence in all humanity and in the *Gāthās*, Zoroaster mentions on numerous occasions how he might be able to drive Druj out of the body and mind.[164] In other places in the *Gāthā*s, evil individuals such as Grehām (the gluttonous one) or groups of evildoers such as the Karapans (mumblers; people who recite in a low voice) and the Kavis (bad poet-sacrificers) are mentioned as those who actively supported Druj by

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[162] Humbach and Ichaporia, *Heritage of Zarathushtra*, 41.
[163] Humbach and Ichaporia, *Heritage of Zarathushtra*, 43.
[164] Humbach and Ichaporia, *Heritage of Zarathushtra*, 69.

hostilely combating the message of Zoroaster.[165] Verses like these are numerous and they all indicate that by the time of the *Gāthās*' composition, there probably was a cult or a religion whose followers were high-ranking individuals who were deemed "devil" worshippers by Zoroaster. According to the *Gāthās*, these followers of Druj had a different opinion as to who was a truthful person, and Zoroaster warns against them: "No man should seek to gratify the multitude of deceitful ones. These (deceitful ones), indeed, declare all harmful persons to be truthful."[166] Yet it seems even the deceitful ones fulfilled a purpose. For instance, *Gāthā* 47:4 states: "The deceitful rip away from this holy spirit those who are not really truthful," and this suggests that Druj and his minions tacitly have been given a task of separating the righteous from the devious.[167]

Is it possible that even Zoroaster had his doubts regarding the nature of both the Druj and the *daēvas*? In *Gāthā* 44:20 for instance, he asks "O Mazdā, have there ever been *daēvas* of good rule?"[168] It seems that Zoroaster really struggled with the notion of evil *daēvas* and questioned the veracity of the claims about their wickedness. It is important to mention that in the *Gāthā*s, the *daēva*s had not yet become demonic forces. They were still venerated by the leaders of the Iranian people and were in fact worshipped even by the people who embraced the message of the *Gāthā*s, thus becoming part of the early Zoroastrian social and religious structure.[169] Zoroaster also asks Ahura Mazdā how he can deliver Druj to Aša so that the former may be purified through the repetition of the good mantra.[170] These verses demonstrate that in the *Gāthā*s, the concept of the

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[165] Humbach and Ichaporia, *Heritage of Zarathushtra*, 43; Prods Oktor Skjærvø, "Rivals and Bad Poets: The Poet's Complain in Old Avetsa," in *Philologica et Linguistica: Historia, Pluralitas, Universita; Festschrift für Helmut Humbach zum 80. Geburtstag am 4. Dezember 2001*, ed, Maria Gabriela Schmidt and Walter Bisang with the collaboration of Marion Grein and Bernhard Hiegl (Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 2001), 353–56.

[166] Humbach and Ichaporia, *Heritage of Zarathushtra*, 65.

[167] Humbach and Ichaporia, *Heritage of Zarathushtra*, 83.

[168] Humbach and Ichaporia, *Heritage of Zarathushtra*, 71.

[169] *Encyclopædia Iranica*, s.v. "Daiva."

[170] Humbach and Ichaporia, *Heritage of Zarathushtra*, 69.

"devil" remained mysterious at best. In the Young Avetsan text, both Angra Mainyu and Druj will assume a more dynamic and formidable role in the cosmic battle between good and evil.

2.2 The Devil in the Young Avestan Texts

The Young Avesta is a collection of various Zoroastrian sacred texts that include hymns such as the *Yašts* and *Yasna*, as well as a later text which is an anti-demonic corpus known as the *Vidēvdād*. It is in these texts that one can observe the formation of an embodied representation of a devil who is the direct antagonist of Ahura Mazdā.

In the *Yasna,* which is the oldest part of the Young Avesta, Druj still seems to be the active demonic force. In *Yasna* 8:5–6 and 60:8–10 for instance, it seems that Ahura Mazdā has power over Druj, as there exists a special prayer to defeat the latter and cast him out from among the creations of Spenta Mainyu.[171] This hints at the possibility that Druj was one of the creations of Spenta Mainyu who later chose the wrong path and became evil. In *Yasna* 8:8 it is mentioned that the Druj has the power of creation, and like Aša who is able create goodness, Druj too is capable of creating all manner of wickedness. In *Yasna* 12:4 it is stated that Druj and other demonic forces also have the power of creation, although their creations are antithetical to the creation of Ahura Mazdā.[172] This is generally interpreted to mean that what the Devil produces is in fact non-creation. Walter Henning astutely observed the equality of the power of creation of the two antagonistic deities within the framework of Zoroastrian dualism:

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[171] Jean Kellens, ed. and trans., *L'acmé du sacrifice: Les parties récentes des Staota Yesniia, Y27.13–Y59, avec les intercalations de Visprad 13 à 24 et la Dahma Afriti, Y60–61*, Études avestiques et mazdéenes vol. 4, Persika 16 (Paris: De Boccard, 2011), 129.

[172] Jean Kellens, ed. and trans., *Le Hōm Stōm et la zone des déclarations: Y 7.24–Y15.4, avec les intercalations de Vr3 à 6*, Études avestiques et mazdéenes vol. 2, Persika 10 (Paris: De Boccard, 2007), 14.

> Any claim that the world was created by a good and benevolent god must provoke the question why the world, in the outcome, is so very far from good. Zoroaster's answer, that the world had been created by a good and an evil spirit of equal power, who set up to spoil the good work, is a complete answer… Ahura Mazdā had not created the Evil Spirit: the Evil spirit independent, hostile to him and his creatures, equal or almost equal in power.[173]

As Gnoli states, there is no doubt that Angra Mainyu, like Ahura Mazdā, was a creating deity, a fact that is mentioned in many places in the Avesta.[174] The notion that the Evil Spirit has the capability of creation suggests that at some point in early Zoroastrian thought he might have been considered the equal of Ahura Mazdā, with the same but opposite powers.

The *Yasna* noticeably state that the *daēvas*, who resembled humans, once freely roamed the earth, but with the coming of Zoroaster they were forced underground.[175] As *Yasna* 12:6 indicates, at one point even Zoroaster had affirmed the authority and lordship of the *daēvas*, but later on he renounced them all in favor of Ahura Mazdā.[176] This demonstrates that the *daēvas* were known as old gods even to Zoroaster before they were ostracized and demonized perhaps by Zoroaster himself.

Angra Mainyu is introduced for the first time in *Yasna* 9:8, also known as *Haoma Yašt*. Angra Mainyu is mentioned as the creator of Aži Dahāka, who was the strongest of the dragon demons, equated with the Druj.[177] In the *Yasna*, there is also a substitution of characters when it

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[173] Walter Bruno Henning, *Zoroaster, Politician or Witch-doctor?* (London: Oxford University Press, 1951), 11, 46.
[174] *Encyclopædia Iranica*, s.v. "Dualism."
[175] Kellens, *Le Hōm Stōm*, 57.
[176] Kellens, *Le Hōm Stōm*, 136.
[177] Kellens, *Le Hōm Stōm*, 51–52.

comes to the antagonism between the two spirits. While in the *Gāthās* it is Spenta Mainyu who declares his opposition to Angra Mainyu, in *Yasna* 19:15 it is Ahura Mazdā himself who states his enmity toward the Evil Spirit: "Neither our minds are in harmony, nor our perceptions, nor our comprehensions, nor our beliefs, nor our words, nor our actions, nor our consciences, nor our souls."[178] This would appear to elevate the status of Angra Mainyu from being the twin spirit of Spenta Mainyu to the direct adversary of Ahura Mazda himself. This is one of the rare instances in the Avestan corpus where Ahura Mazdā addresses Angra Mainyu directly. As Gershevitch rightly noticed, what is even more fascinating is the fact that in all of the Avesta, except for one instance in the *Vidēvdād*, while Angra Mainyu is openly at war with Spenta Mainyu and other benevolent beings, his hostility is never aimed directly at Ahura Mazdā.[179] In other words, while Ahura Mazdā propagates hatred of the Evil Spirit, the latter never expresses any direct resentment toward the former. Ahura Mazdā deploys many of the Bounteous Immortals (Ameša Spentas) and other deities such as Sraoša and Mithra to combat Angra Mainyu, whose minions include Wrath of the Bloody Club (Aēšema), Druj, the Demon of Envy (Āz), and the Demon of Strife and Beguiling (Ašemaugh).[180] In fact, some parts of the *Yasna* are dedicated to the mantras which are formulated to repel these demonic forces.

In another Young Avestan source, namely the *Yašts*, the *daēvas* become even more personified. For instance, for the first time, Druj is assigned the geographical direction of the north, which is also the direction of Hell. Another example of this personification is in the *Ohrmazd Yašt* where it is mentioned that one of the Ameša Spentas, namely Spenta-Ārmaiti, can tear apart the

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[178] Kellens, *Le Hōm Stōm*, 44–45.
[179] Gershevitch, "Zoroaster's Own Contribution," 14.
[180] Kellens, *L'acmé du sacrifice*, 93, 97.

ears of the *daēvas*, tie their hands, smash their weapons, and bind them in fetters.[181] Besides the *daēvas* there is an army of demons and evil beings, including sorcerers, *peris,* and the primeval Prostitute (*jahī*), which one has to repel by means of incantations and spells. In fact, many chapters in the *Yašts*, such as *Ašawahišt Yašt* and *Haurvatāt Yašt*, are mostly dedicated to the ways by which one can overcome different forms of evil beings, from wild beasts to demons. These demonic forces can be beaten and pushed back to where they came from, namely the north, by the recitation of certain mantras and incantations. By reciting these mantras which are dedicated to different Ameša Spentas, one is directly helping them to repel the forces of Angra Mainyu.

Yet it seems that even demons sometimes pray to the Ameša Spentas for assistance. In one of the hymns to the Heavenly River (*Ardvīsūr Yašt*), Aži Dahāka, the chief dragon demon of Angra Mainyu, is reported to bring a hundred stallions, a thousand bulls, and ten thousand rams as an offering to one of the Ameša Spentas, the guardian goddess of water, Aredvī Sūrā Ānāhītā, and he praises her so that she may grant his wish.[182] Instead, she rejects him and grants the wishes of his enemy, the mythical hero Thraētaona.[183] Even the demonic forces had faith in the positive power of the Ameša Spentas to grant them their wishes. This raises the question of the origins of Zoroastrianism demonology. If a chief dragon demon like Aži Dahāka was able to appreciate the benevolence of Ahuraic beings such as Aredvī Sūrā Ānāhītā, then why was he and other *daēvas* considered to be so devilish in Zoroastrianism?

In *Ardvīsūr Yašt,* it seems that not only were the boundaries between mythical heroes and demons drawn, but a lot of information was provided about the nature of people who were

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[181] Fritz Wolff, ed. and trans., *Avestā: Die heiligen Bücher der Parsen* (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1960), 157.

[182] Wolff, *Avestā*, 170–1.

[183] Wolff, *Avestā*, 170–1.

unworthy of praising Aredvī Sūrā Anāhītā and thereby receiving the holy libation and sacrifice that was offered to her worshippers. The ones who were forbidden from participating in the ceremony dedicated to Anāhītā that was performed from dawn to dusk were not only the heretics and followers of the *daēvas* but, as *Ardvīsūr Yašt* indicates, basically anybody with any imperfection in the body or mind. In verses 92–93, the deity Anāhītā herself states:

> 92. Let not drink of this my libation, no man fever-sick, no cripple, no impotent, no woman, no parishioner who does not sing the *Gāthās*, no leper [who is] to be confined. 93. I do not accept those libations that are drunk for the sake of my happiness by the blind, the deaf, the dwarf, the idiot, the epileptic…. by the one carrying the mark [of Angra Mainyu?]. Let no one drink of my libations who is hump-backed or bulged forward and no dwarf with crooked teeth.[184]

All of these people who had such disabilities were considered to be branded by Angra Mainyu and therefore were assumed to be unholy and ritually impure. In Zoroastrianism, all the imperfections in human body and mind were thought to be the creation of Angra Mainyu and all the good human qualities the creation of Ahura Mazdā. It is not hard to imagine how that must have felt to the scores of sick and disabled individuals who were seen as carrying the brand of the Devil and therefore marginalized and excluded from the communal ceremonies. In contrast, being tall, handsome and without any external imperfections of the body and mind were considered to be blessings from Ahura Mazdā, and always associated with nobility and royalty. If one is to

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[184] Wolff, *Avestā*, 177. Skjærvø translates this passage as follows: "But let no one drink of this my libation who has a fever, a fat person, someone with pimples, or a woman or a skilled man who does not perform the *Gathas*, or a leper whose body has been secluded! I do not accept those libations of which females drink for my sake who are blind or deaf ... or carrying the mark of one who, while not possessing much skill, launches all kinds of (unskilled) poetic thoughts," See Skjærvø, *Spirit of Zoroastrianism*, 62.

investigate the Iranian Sufis' attitude toward Iblīs and his connection to Angra Mainyu, this can be a very good starting point. Many Sufis embraced physical and mental disabilities and they became champions for the handicapped, the disfigured, and the sick. If those imperfections were caused by the Devil himself, then Sufis were going to admire him as well because, like the people for whom they cared, the Devil symbolized the outcast, the dispossessed, and the degenerate.

In the *Ardvīsūr Yašt*, Zoroaster asks the deity Ānāhītā: "What happens to the libations offered to you after the sun has set, by the ones who sacrifice to the *daēvas* and glorify Druj," and Ānāhītā responds: "Verily, righteous Spitama Zoroaster! The shuddering, the clamping, the mocking and the despised, six hundred and a thousand *daēvas*, who ought not to receive my libation, receive it."[185] From this passage, it is clear that there were groups who worshipped the *daēvas*, or as Skjaervo and Boyce refer to them, the old gods, and offered libations and held ceremonies in their honor. It was also likely that the people who honored the *daēvas* also wanted to worship the Ameša Spentas but were prohibited from doing so by the Zoroastrian priesthood. Were these groups of people the same outcasts of whom *Yašt* 5:92–93 speaks? After all, if they are told by the Zoroastrian priesthood that according to *Ardvīsūr Yašt,* Ānāhītā does not accept their libation and therefore she does not attend their ceremonies, then what other deities were left to them, except the old gods (*daēvas*) who like them, were now demonized and ostracized? According to verse 95 of *Ardvīsūr Yašt*, Ānāhītā already had the answer: the *daēvas* would attend such libation ceremonies.

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[185] Wolff, *Avestā*, 178. Skjærvø translates this passage as follows: "O upright Spitama-son, sustainer of Order, they are to be rejected with words of woe, to be ground under the heels, to be laughed back, to be booed back, these libations that fly after me by six-hundreds and a thousand, which are not accepted even at the sacrifice to the evil gods," See Skjærvø, *Spirit of Zoroastrianism*, 62.

Iranian Sufis who advocated for Iblīs embraced all the physical and mental deformities that Zoroastrians regarded as the brand of Angra Mainyu. They posited themselves in complete contrast to the Zoroastrian ideal of physical and mental perfection. To them, the Devil, whether Iblīs or Angra Mainyu, became the quintessential representative of the divinely rejected and godforsaken individuals who were outcasts in the eyes of society. Like the worshippers of *daēvas* mentioned in the Avesta, Sufis too held their ceremonies at night when they prayed, danced, and performed their sacred rites.

Another interesting passage regarding the rank and position of Angra Mainyu is found in *Ašawahišt Yašt*, (Yt. 3:13). The passage refers to the defeat of Angra Mainyu at the hands of one of the Ameša Spentas called the Best Order (Ašawahišt). It states: "He who smashed of these old gods [*daēvas*] a thousand for a thousand, ten thousand for ten thousand. He fell headlong from heaven the most deceptive of *daēvas*, the Angra Mainyu full of destruction. He [Angra Mainyu] said: 'Woe to me! Blast Best Order!'"[186] This is the only place in the Avesta that indicates Angra Mainyu fell down from heaven, and like the story of Lucifer and Iblīs, in this episode Angra Mainyu also falls down from heaven after a cosmic combat with an archangel.

Lastly there is a peculiar portrayal of Angra Mainyu provided in two sections of the *Yašt*s that is worth mentioning. In *Yašt* 15:12 (*Rām Yašt*) the mythical Iranian hero Takhma Urupi (NP Tahmūras) asks the deity Vayu for victory over all the *daēvas* and men, and to turn Angra Mainyu into the shape of a horse so that he can ride around on him from one end of the earth to the other for thirty years, which wish Vayu grants him.[187] Another version of this narrative is found in *Zāmyād Yašt* (Yt.19:29) where Takhma Urupi, furnished with the power of kingly charisma and

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[186] Wolff, *Avestā*, 162; Skjærvø, *Spirit of Zoroastrianism*, 9.
[187] Wolff, *Avestā*, 269.

glory (*xwarenah*), was able to ride Angra Mainyu, who was transformed into the shape of a horse, around the earth for thirty years.[188] This narrative is also repeated in some of the later Zoroastrian sources of the Islamic period. While there is no elucidating commentary for this peculiar anecdote, nevertheless there are several interesting questions that are raised about the nature of this tale. How was a mere deity or a mythical hero able to turn the fearsome devil into a horse, and if Angra Mainyu was so powerless to allow such a thing to happens to himself, then why is he so feared, and his powers exaggerated? Why was Ahura Mazdā or one of the Ameša Spentas not able to defeat or contain him in the form of a horse forever? Moreover, why was he turned into a horse, which is not considered a noxious animal (*xrafstar*)? The act of riding a horse symbolizes taming a beast in order to gain comfort and benefit. All of these issues create the impression that Angra Mainyu can be tamed and turned into a beneficial being— an image that is at odds with the way in which Angra Mainyu is portrayed in Zoroastrianism.

Zoroastrian dualism also made an impression on the non-Iranians, especially the Greeks. One of the earliest Greek sources on the issue of Zoroastrian dualism is attributed to Aristotle. A third-century biographer of Greek philosophers called Diogenes Laertius relates that "Aristotle in the first book of *On Philosophy* says that they [the Magi] are more ancient than the Egyptians, and that according to them there are two first principles, a good spirit and an evil spirit, one called Zeus and Oromasdes [i.e., Ahura Mazdā], the other Hades and Arimanius [i.e., Angra Mainyu]."[189] In a fragment, Eudemus, a contemporary and an important pupil of Aristotle, also talks about a proto-

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[188] Humbach and Ichaporia, *Zamyād Yasht*, 36.

[189] Jonathan Barnes and Gavin Lawrence, trans., "Fragments," in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Bollingen Series (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984), 2:2390.

Zurvanite dualistic cosmology. This fragment which is related by a Neo-Platonist philosopher called Damascius (d. after 538 CE) states:

> As for the Magi and the entire Iranian race, as Eudemus writes about this, some of them call the intelligible and unified universe Space (Topos), and others call it Time (Chronos) [i.e., Zurvān], from which are differentiated either a good deity or a bad demon, or light and darkness before these, as some say. And they then themselves posit the twofold differentiated rank of the superiors after the undifferentiated nature, one leader of which is Horomasda [i.e., Ahrura Mazdā] and the other of which is Areimanios [i.e., Angra Mainyu].[190]

Plutarch, in his *Isis and Osiris*, elaborates on the nature of universal dualism with an emphasis on the religion of Zoroaster:

> The great majority and the wisest of men hold this opinion: they believe that there are two gods, rivals as it were, the one the Artificer of good and the other of evil. There are also those who call the better one a god and the other a daemon, as, for example Zoroaster the sage… called the one Oromazes [i.e., Ahura Mazdā] and the other Areimanius [i.e., Angra Mainyu] and he further declared that among all the things perceptible to the senses, Oromazes may best be compared to light, and Areimanius, conversely, to darkness and ignorance. Zoroaster has also taught that men should make votive offerings and thank-offerings to Oromazes, and averting and mourning offerings to Areimanius. They pound up in a mortar a certain plant called Omomi [i.e., Haoma]

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[190] Sara Ahbel-Rappe, trans., *Damascius' Problems and Solutions Concerning First Principles*, Religion in Translation (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 418.

> at the same time invoking Hades and Darkness; then they mix it with the blood of a wolf that has been sacrificed, and carry it out and cast it into a place where the sun never shines.[191]

It appears that Plutarch suggested that Zoroaster taught the Persians to sacrifice to Angra Mainyu and this, along with other evidences in Pahlavi sources, is taken as an attestation that there existed a cult of Angra Mainyu.[192] While the descriptions of Zoroastrian rites may seems fanciful, the fact that the Greeks perceived the dichotomy between good and evil as the foundation of Zoroaster's religious philosophy is further testimony that dualism came to be viewed as the defining principle of Zoroastrianism.

2.2.1 The Devil in the *Vidēvdād*

The *Vidēvdād*, which is the last section of the Avesta and hence the most recent part, was in fact composed as a liturgical source to combat demons. It literally means "the law repelling the *daēva*s" and thus most of the references to Zoroastrian demonology in the Avesta can be found in this particular source. It begins with a contestation between Ahura Mazdā's creations and Angra Mainyu's counter-creation of sin and demonic forces. From this point onward, Angra Mainyu and his minions will be an ever-present menace to the authority and creations of Ahura Mazdā.

More than any other part of the Avesta, the *Vidēvdād* defines the characteristics of Angra Mainyu. He is no longer an abstract idea or, like the Druj, a mere representation of a negative force. He is forceful, garrulous, and cunning. As his power grows in the *Vidēvdād*, so does the

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[191] Plutarch, "Isis and Osiris," in *Plutarch Moralia Volume 5*. trans. Frank Cole Babbitt, Loeb Classical Library 306 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1936), 111–13.

[192] *Encyclopædia Iranica*, s.v. "Ahriman."

scope of Zoroastrians law which attempts to curtail his influence at every step. Throughout the *Vidēvdād,* the reader is reminded that any physical imperfection is considered the brand of Angra Mainyu, while at the same time, the scope of these physical imperfections grows ever wider. For instance, in the story of the mythical Iranian king Yīmā (NP Jamshīd), while he was ordered by Ahura Mazdā to build a subterranean enclosure known as Var, which had a function similar to Noah's Ark, he was instructed to gather all plants, animals, and humans, but the followings were forbidden to enter the Var:

> May no one with humps, in front or in the back, nor an impotent nor a lunatic, deceitful one, one with pustules, or a crooked one, nor one with decaying teeth, or one with leprosy whose body has been excluded, nor any of the other marks that are the mark Angra Mainyu put on man.[193]

This instruction is repeated twice in *Vidēvdād* 29 and 37 and the list of undesirable people who were not deemed fit to enter Yīmā's Var grew longer. This passage in *Vidēvdād* and a few others like it demonstrate that physical and mental disability was viewed by the Zoroastrian priesthood as the mark of the Devil. Yet perhaps for this reason, to the Iranian Sufis the Devil became the quintessential representative of the dispossessed and disfigured.

This was not the only line of demarcation between what Iranian Sufis considered ideal and what, in contrast, the Zoroastrian priesthood saw as a pitiful and lowly state of existence. For instance, *Vidēvdād* 3:33 states that "No one who does not eat has the ability to perform the works of Aša, strength to do works of husbandry, strength to beget sons."[194] *Vidēvdād* 4:48 praises eating

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[193] Wolff, *Avestā*, 323.
[194] Wolff, *Avestā*, 330.

meat by saying: "And between two men, he who fills his stomach with meat receives in him Good thought (Vohū Mana) much better than he who does not do so."[195] It goes on to say that the person who eats can withstand the onslaught of various demons, most important among them the demon of strife, discontent, and heresy who is constantly fasting, i.e., the ungodly Ašemaogha.[196] This idea was in complete opposition to the practices of Sufis who viewed hunger as a virtue, and some fasted all year round. Indeed, many Sufis considered having a full stomach as a sin and believed that the temptation of Satan would have less effect on the hungry. However, to designate one of Angra Mainyu's lieutenants as a demon who constantly fasted demonstrates the vast gap between what the Zoroastrian priesthood and the Sufis considered to be demonic or holy. Once more, it seems that Sufis adopted another act that was viewed by Zoroastrians to be the work of the Devil, namely the act of remaining hungry, as a virtue; and therefore, by extension, they embraced the Devil as the champion of the hungry masses.

There are other verses in the *Vidēvdād* which are also opposed to the Sufi ways of life. In *Vidēvdād* 4:47 for instance, Ahura Mazdā tells Zoroaster:

> The man who has a wife is far above him who is unmarried; he who keeps a house is far above him who has none; he who has children is far above the childless man; he who has riches is far above him who is poor.[197]

These virtues mentioned in the *Vidēvdād* were viewed by many Sufi either as hindrances (as in the case of having a wife and children), or as being loathsome and detestable ways of life (as in the case of having riches).

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[195] Wolff, *Avestā*, 339.
[196] Wolff, *Avestā*, 339.
[197] Wolff, *Avestā*, 339.

Another aspect of Zoroastrianism which was abhorrent to the Iranian Sufis was the categorization of certain animals as noxious (*xrafstar*), a concept that the *Vidēvdād* discusses in great detail. Like all other aspects of dualism in Zoroastrianism, animals were divided into either beneficial or noxious. The list is a long one, but it suffices to say that in Zoroastrianism, all the wild animals, insects, invertebrates, amphibians, and reptiles were considered noxious and unclean. Zoroastrian sacred texts indicate that in the cosmic battle between good and evil, these *xrafstars* were created by Angra Mainyu to harm the beneficent creation of Ahura Mazdā. As *Vidēvdād* 13:6 suggests, a few of these animals, such as the frog and the tortoise, were even considered to be *daēvas*.[198] Therefore, killing them became a meritorious deed in Zoroastrianism and in many cases done for the absolution of sins. For instance in *Vidēvdād* 14, it is instructed that as the recompense for the sin of killing a beaver, which was considered one of the holiest of creatures of Ahura Mazdā, one must kill, among other things, ten thousand snakes, ten thousand frogs, ten thousand tortoises, ten thousand earth worms, and ten thousand seed-carrying ants.[199] In another instance, if a woman's menses did not stop after nine days, it was considered the work of the *daēvas* and the result of the worshipping and glorification of the *daēvas* by the people.[200] To remedy it, Mazdā worshippers were required to kill two hundred grain-carrying ants if it was summertime and two hundred other types of *xrafstars*, which are created by Angra Mainyu, if it was wintertime.[201] The Zoroastrian priests were so adamant about annihilating these noxious creatures that they designed a special tool for this purpose called *Xrafstaraghan*, which, along with other tools, was carried by the priestly class at all times.[202]

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[198] Wolff, *Avestā*, 396.
[199] Wolff, *Avestā*, 405.
[200] Wolff, *Avestā*, 414.
[201] Wolff, *Avestā*, 414.
[202] Wolff, *Avestā*, 417.

To Sufis, the act of killing animals was a grave transgression against their belief system. Persian hagiographies contain many stories about the kindness of Sufis toward many of the animals and insects which would have been deemed noxious by Zoroastrians. The most fascinating tale is in ʿAṭṭār's *Taẕkirat al-auliyāʾ* in the section pertaining to the great Persian Sufi Bāyazīd Ṭayfūr b. ʿĪsā b. Surūshān Basṭāmī (d. ca. 261/875), whose grandfather was a Zoroastrian. It is said that once when he was coming back from Mecca to his hometown Basṭām, he stopped in the city of Hamadān and purchased some safflower seeds. He consumed some and put the rest in his Sufi cloak. When he reached Basṭām, he opened his cloak and a few ants came out of it. He told himself: "I made these [creatures] homeless." He was so distraught by his unintended action that he took the ants all the way back to the city of Hamadān and placed them at the entrance to their nest.[203] In Persian hagiographies there are many other anecdotes, such as this one, featuring scorpions, snakes, and other creatures reviled by the Zoroastrians. Even a non-Sufi poet like Abū al-Qāsim Firdausī (d. ca. 416/1025), who had immense knowledge of Zoroastrianism, seems to object to the particular instruction of the *Vidēvdād* pertaining to the killing of the grain-carrying ant when he states: "Do not kill an ant which carries his provision; because he also has a soul and having a soul is sweet."[204]

At first, it appears that Iranian Sufis indirectly did their best to refute the notion that any living being was the creation of the Devil. The same attitude that Sufis held in regard to the disabled, the disfigured and the hungry was also held toward the so-called *xrafstars*, which they considered to be God's creatures. It seems that Sufis wanted to send a message that if these

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[203] Farīd al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm ʿAṭṭār Nīshābūrī, *Taẕkirat al-auliyāʾ*, ed. Muḥammad Riżā Shafīʿī Kadkanī (Tehran: Sukhan, 1398/2019), 1:164.

[204] Abu'l-Qasem Ferdowsi, *The Shahnameh (Book of Kings)*, ed. Djalal Khaleghi-Motlagh, Persian Text Series (New York: Bibliotheca Persica, 1988), 1:120.

innocent beings had to be annihilated because they were considered the creations of Angra Mainyu, then they were their supporters and the supporters of the deity who created them.

One of the most mysterious chapters of the *Vidēvdād* is chapter 19. In it, there is a dialogue that takes place between Zoroaster and Angra Mainyu. While in chapter 18 there was already a similar dialogue between the deity Sraoša and Druj, who in the *Vidēvdād* seems to be the chief demon of Angra Mainyu, the dialogue between the Zoroaster and the Devil in chapter 19 is more philosophical and has less to do with rituals. The chapter begins with Angra Mainyu commanding Druj to go and kill Zoroaster.[205] Through the power of prayer, Zoroaster is able to repel him. The text then speaks of the fact that in his soul Zoroaster could see that Angra Mainyu and his minions were plotting to kill him but he was unafraid of the Evil Spirit and the "difficulty of his devilish riddles."[206] How Zoroaster's soul enabled him to see the plot of Angra Mainyu would be an intriguing inquiry, but more importantly what were the devilish riddles of Angra Mainyu? Next, Zoroaster picked up a rock and at that moment Angra Mainyu approached him. Some of the imagery of the tale is reminiscent of the temptation of Jesus in the New Testament. Angra Mainyu asks Zoroaster what he was doing in the wilderness and planning to do with the rock in his hand, and after Zoroaster says that he was going to smite all the *daēvas* with it, Angra Mainyu responds:

> Do not destroy my creatures, O holy Zoroaster! Thou art the son of Pourušaspa; I was invoked by your mother. Renounce the good religion of the Mazda worshipping, and you shall obtain a boon such as the one the land-lord Vadhaghana obtained.[207]

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[205] Wolff, *Avestā*, 426.
[206] Wolff, *Avestā*, 426.
[207] Wolff, *Avestā*, 427.

In this passage, Angra Mainyu tries to tempt Zoroaster, promising him the sovereignty of the world if only he would reject the faith of Mazdā. This raises the question as to when Angra Mainyu acquired the power to be a king-maker and a bestower of sovereignty, a power usually reserved for Ahura Mazdā.

In the Middle Persian, or Pahlavi, *Vidēvdād*, there is a commentary which indicates that Angra Mainyu, who is called by one of his other names, Gannag Mainyu (Stinking Spirit), tells Zoroaster: "I am worshipped even by thy ancestors, you too worship me."[208] There seems to be little commentary as to whether Zoroaster's ancestors or even his mother were worshippers of Angra Mainyu. However, this just demonstrates that worshipping Angra Mainyu must have had a tremendous impact on the author(s) of the *Vidēvdād*. After all, if by the admission of the priestly class who wrote the *Vidēvdād*, Zoroaster's ancestors were worshippers of Angra Mainyu, then Zoroaster was faced with a dilemma to reject the religion of his ancestors and adopt a completely new religion which not only abandoned the veneration of the old gods and their chief deity, Angra Mainyu, but also turned Angra Mainyu into the archenemy of the new god, Ahura Mazdā. In *Vidēvdād* 19.1 and also 19.43–44, Angra Mainyu is said to be the chief of all the *daēvas*, or "the *daēva* of the *daēvas*" (*daēvanam daēvō*), and nowhere in the Avesta is he said to be the creator of the *daēvas* or their father.[209]

In *Vidēvdād* 19.8–9, Angra Mainyu asks Zoroaster by which word or mantra he is going to overcome him. In asking such a leading question, it seems that he is already providing the answer for Zoroaster. Zoroaster also seems a bit naive because he divulges the mantras he is planning to use. At the end of the chapter, after Angra Mainyu recognizes that he cannot bring down Zoroaster,

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[208] Mahnaz Moazami, *Wrestling with the Demons of the Pahlavi Widēwdād: Transcription, Translation, and Commentary*, Iran Studies 9 (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 344.

[209] *Encyclopædia Iranica*, s.v. "Ahriman."

he gathers all the *daēvas* at the gates of Hell and tells them: "How shall we find death for him? He is the smiter of the *daēvas*, he is the opponent of *daēvas*, he is the one who destroys the *daēvas*, he is a Druj to the Druj…"[210] Calling Zoroaster a Druj to the Druj might just be to demonstrate his powers against the demonic forces, but combined with the issue of his ancestors' beliefs, the extraordinary power of his soul that enables him a glimpse into the world of the *daēvas*, and finally his ability to speak with Angra Mainyu in a common tongue, one wonders what his true relationship was with the Evil Spirit. This episode might be the first instance in the Persian language in which a holy man has a dialogue with the Devil, an occurrence which repeats itself many times in the Persian Sufi literature almost a millennium after the composition of the *Vidēvdād*.

2.3 **The Transformation of the Devil in Pahlavi Literature.**

By the time the Persian language transitioned from Old Persian to Middle Persian, or Pahlavi, which was spoken from the 3rd century BCE to about the 9th century CE, the image of the Devil went through a major transformation.[211] With the transformation of the language, the names of the two opposing deities also changed: Angra Mainyu became Ahriman and Ahura Mazdā became Ohrmazd. Pahlavi literature can be divided into two eras: the first contains the body of works which are generally assumed to have been composed in Sasanian times, and the second corpus which was composed after the Arab conquest. Each of these periods defined Ahriman in a particular way.

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[210] Wolff, *Avestā*, 427.

[211] Maria Macuch, "Pahlavi Literature," in *The Literature of Pre-Islamic Iran: Companion Volume 1 to A History of Persian Literature*, ed. Maria Macuch and Ronald E. Emmerick, A History of Persian Literature, vol. 17 (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009), 116.

Perhaps the oldest extant sets of Pahlavi works are exegetical works, called *Zand* and *Pāzand*. These include a variety of compositions, from cosmological works, such as *Bundahišn* (Primal Creation), to compendiums of religious and ethical texts such as *Dēnkard* (Acts of the Religion) and the *Mēnōg ī Xrad (*the Spirit of Wisdom*)*. In almost all genres of Pahlavi literature, there are references to Ahriman, demonstrating the obsessive preoccupation of Zoroastrians, especially its clergy, with the concept of the Devil.

2.3.1 Ahriman at the Beginning of Creation

To fully investigate the story of Ahriman at the beginning of creation, Pahlavi sources are the best place to start due to the lack of enough information in the Avesta itself. There is no unified narrative regarding the role Ahriman played in the process of creation, and accounts often vary from one source to another. The most extensive description of the events concerning Ahriman's coming into existence can be found in the first chapter of the Pahlavi cosmological text, *Bundahišn*. According to the *Bundahišn*, before creation, Ohrmazd was on high, in omniscience and endless light, while Ahriman was deep down in the darkness, in the post-knowledge and aggression.[212] Between him and Ohrmazd there was a void called *Wāy* which was the border between the two and they were not connected to one another, yet the two were both infinite and finite. Ahriman was infinite in darkness and Ohrmazd was infinite in light and both were finite in themselves.[213] These passages clearly demonstrate the dichotomy between two opposite forces.

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[212] Carlo G Cereti and David N. MacKenzie, eds. and trans., "Except by Battle: Zoroastrian Cosmogony in the 1st Chapter of the Greater Bundahišn," in *Religious Themes and Texts of Pre-Islamic Iran and Central Asia: Studies in Honour of Professor Gherardo Gnoli on the Occasion of His 65th Birthday on 6th December 2002*, ed. Carlo G. Cereti, Mauro Maggi, and Elio Provasi, Beiträge zur Iranistik 24 (Wiesbaden: Reichert, 2003), 32–33; cf. Domenico Agostini and Samuel Thrope, eds. and trans., *The Bundahišn*: *The Zoroastrian Book of Creation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 6.

[213] Cereti and MacKenzie, "Except by Battle," 33; cf. Agostini and Thrope, *Bundahišn*, 6.

The fact that Ahriman was infinite in his darkness hints at the great power he possessed even when described negatively.

Due to his omniscience, Ohrmazd knew not only that Ahriman existed, but also that due to his jealousy, Ahriman was going to mix his own creation with that of Ohrmazd. Therefore, Ohrmazd decided to create, in spirit, those creatures which were necessary to counter Ahriman's plans.[214] This passage seems to confirm that Ohrmazd pre-emptively created forces to combat Ahriman even before the latter started his attack. Ahriman, on the other hand, due to his post-knowledge (i.e., knowledge of events only after they happen), was unaware of the existence of Ohrmazd. Then one day he rose up and from the deep came to the border, within sight of the light and when he realized that the light of Ohrmazd was inaccessible (MP *agriftār*), he attacked it.[215] While the text attempts to depict Ahriman as the initiator of the animosity, it seems that it was actually Ohrmazd who pre-emptively created an army to combat Ahriman and did not want to share his light with Ahriman, hence making it inaccessible. The text fails to explain how it came to be that Ohrmazd ended up on high, omniscient and luminous, while the unfortunate Ahriman was down below in darkness and ignorance. It seems the theory that suggests the two deities 'chose' to be good or evil loses its allure when one considers the fact that the conditions were set to be so unbalanced and unequal at the very onset of the cosmic battle.

According to the *Bundahišn*, when Ahriman saw the formidability of Ohrmazd, he returned to the darkness and created many demons and fiends who rose to do battle. Then both deities looked at each other's creation.[216] Ohrmazd did not praise the creation of Ahriman but Ahriman

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[214] Cereti and MacKenzie, "Except by Battle," 34; cf. Agostini and Thrope, *Bundahišn*, 6.
[215] Cereti and MacKenzie, "Except by Battle," 34; cf. Agostini and Thrope, *Bundahišn*, 6.
[216] Cereti and MacKenzie, "Except by Battle," 34; cf. Agostini and Thrope, *Bundahišn*, 7.

found the creation of Ohrmazd to be proportionate and beautiful and therefore praised it.[217] The question here is how can Ahriman, who is depicted as the epitome of foulness and maliciousness, be able to appreciate and praise the beauty and magnificence of the creation of his archenemy, Ohrmazd? Was this a slip of the pen on the part of the composers of the *Bundahišn*? It appears that in this very passage too, it was Ohrmazd who initiated the hostility by not praising the creation of Ahriman.

The text then takes an odd turn. Due to his omniscience, Ohrmazd recognized that there was going to be a war. Therefore, he went to Ahriman and offered him peace, saying:

> 21. Evil Spirit! Provide help for my creatures and offer praise, so that as a reward therefore you may become immortal and ageless and without feeling or decay. 22 and the reason for it (is) this, that if you do not provoke battle, you yourself will not become powerless and you will promote benefit for both of us.[218]

It seems that more than being a peace offer, this was an intimidation tactic by which Ohrmazd demanded the capitulation of Ahriman. Clearly speaking from a position of superiority, Ohrmazd was dictating his condition to an inferior. However, what is even more interesting is the fact that in verse 22, Ohrmazd admitted that Ahriman would be promoting mutual benefit if he cooperated and did not provoke a battle. In other words, as long as Ahriman did not provoke battle, he was going to be considered beneficial to Ohrmazd and his creation. So, one can deduce that Ahriman became malevolent and evil only because he disagreed with Ohrmazd; otherwise he would have been accepted by Ohrmazd as a beneficent deity.

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[217] Cereti and MacKenzie, "Except by Battle," 34; cf. Agostini and Thrope, *Bundahišn*, 7.
[218] Cereti and MacKenzie, "Except by Battle," 35; cf. Agostini and Thrope, *Bundahišn*, 7.

Panaino believes that Ahriman assumed that Ohrmazd's offer of peace with him was only a manifestation of his fear and weakness.[219] However, this is not explicitly stated in the passage; it is only stated that Ahriman thought Ohrmazd could not do anything against him. The intention of the composers of this passage of the *Bundahišn* was clear: they wanted to depict Ohrmazd as an honorable deity who offered peace even to Ahriman, and to absolve himself of the liability for initiating a cosmic war. This offer of peace on Ohrmazd's part becomes even more intriguing, considering the fact that in Zoroastrianism, fighting against Ahriman is always considered a duty. By examining the conditions of this peace offer, it is easy to conclude that it was Ohrmazd who was the instigator. It must first be stressed that before this offering of peace, no battle ever took place, and stating that the omniscience of Ohrmazd enabled Him to have knowledge of the forthcoming battle only demonstrates that power was distributed unequally between the two. Ohrmazd demanded that Ahriman help his creatures and praise them, but it seems that the composers of the *Bundahišn* forgot that a few verses earlier, they mentioned that Ahriman, in fact, did praise the creation of Ohrmazd. As for helping Ohrmazd's creation, Ahriman, as the only existing deity, must have felt insulted by such a proposal. By enumerating the benefits of this proposal, namely becoming immortal, ageless, without decay and powerful, Ohrmazd was indicating that if Ahriman refused the offer, he was going to become a decrepit and decaying mortal who was also powerless. Ahriman's response to such a proposal was predictable. He howled:

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[219] Panaino, "Cosmologies and Astrology," 239.

> I shall not provide help for your creatures and not offer praise, but I shall destroy you and your creatures forever and ever. I shall lead all your creatures to enmity toward you and friendship toward me.[220]

While Ahriman's response comes as no surprise, the last sentence of this passage has an unmistakable similarity to Iblīs's response to God in the Qurʾan, as discussed at length in Chapter 1. It seems that in both the *Bundahišn* and the Qurʾan, God demanded submission of the Devil in the form of praise for His creation, and in both cases the Devil refused to praise the creation and in turn threatened that he was going to lead the creatures toward animosity to God and friendship to himself.

Ohrmazd then recognized that he had to set a time for the battle; otherwise, Ahriman would destroy his entire creation and make it his own during the time of Mixture.[221] In Zoroastrian cosmology, the Mixture (MP *gumēzišn*) refers to one of the epochs in which the creations of Ohrmazd would be cohabiting the world with the creation of Ahriman. Therefore Ohrmazd, who knew that he could only defeat Ahriman at the end of time, suggested a pact with him so that they might be able to carry out their battle during a set time of nine thousand years, to which Ahriman consented.[222] From the beginning Ohrmazd knew that there would be a pact between him and Ahriman.[223] This pact not only demonstrates the inability of Ohrmazd to defeat Ahriman, but it also shows that instead of direct assault on his enemy and the enemy of his creation, he used his power of omniscience to trick Ahriman. In another Pahlavi text called *Dādistān-i Mēnōg ī Xrad*,

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[220] Cereti and MacKenzie, "Except by Battle," 35. cf. Agostini and Thrope, *Bundahišn*, 7.
[221] Cereti and MacKenzie, "Except by Battle," 35. cf. Agostini and Thrope, *Bundahišn*, 7.
[222] Cereti and MacKenzie, "Except by Battle," 35. cf. Agostini and Thrope, *Bundahišn*, 7.
[223] Cereti and MacKenzie, "Except by Battle," 33.

generally known by its shorter title *Mēnōg ī Xrad,* there is a passage which explains that Ohrmazd and Ahriman agreed to a treaty (MP

paymān) for nine thousand winters and until these nine thousand years passed, no one could have any influence on Ahriman.[224] As Shaul Shaked noted, the pact made Ahriman a partner in the act of creation, as the creation of Ohrmazd could not have begun without the original consent of Ahriman.[225]

Ohrmazd then uttered a sacred prayer by which Ahriman was stupefied, rendered powerless and went back into the darkness for three thousand years during which time Ohrmazd was able to create his creation in the material form.[226] The *Bundahišn* states that the act of creation made Ohrmazd lord and before that he was not the lord.[227] Ohrmazd also knew that Ahriman would never cease his hostility and only by creating time could he give his creations a chance to resist the Devil. Ohrmazd also knew that by creating time he would give power to the creations of Ahriman as well; therefore, he created time out of necessity.[228] So it is safe to assume that Ohrmazd indirectly helped Ahriman by giving power to his creation.

Whereas it seems that there was a tacit agreement and even collaboration between God and Iblīs, as amply discussed in Chapter 1, in Zoroastrianism, the various Pahlavi sources openly discuss and elucidate the pact that Ohrmazd and Ahriman made at the beginning of creation. Another Pahlavi text called *Vizīdagīhā ī Zādspram* narrates the story somewhat differently. Like the *Bundahišn*, in the *Vizīdagīhā ī Zādspram*, Ahriman is situated in the dark abyss while Ohrmazd

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[224] Aḥmad Tafażżulī, ed. and trans., *Mīnū-yi khirad* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Bunyād-i Farhang-i Irān 1354/1975), 22.

[225] Shaul Shaked, *Dualism in Transformation: Varieties of Religion in Sasanian Iran* (London: School of Oriental and African Studies, 1994), 6.

[226] Cereti and MacKenzie, "Except by Battle," 36; cf. Agostini and Thrope, *Bundahišn*, 8.

[227] Cereti and MacKenzie, "Except by Battle," 36; cf. Agostini and Thrope, *Bundahišn*, 8.

[228] Cereti and MacKenzie, "Except by Battle," 37; cf. Agostini and Thrope, *Bundahišn*, 8–9.

is on an illuminated high peak. However, in the *Vizīdagīhā ī Zādspram*, there is no talk of Ohrmazd's omniscience, just the fact that before the two met, Ohrmazd knew about the existence of Ahriman and that he was coming for a battle.[229] While moving in the darkness, Ahriman came close to the top region and saw a ray of light and wanted to get hold of it but he was unable to because his essence was different from that of Ohrmazd.[230] The text fails to shed light on the reason for this difference. As in the *Bundahišn*, in *Vizīdagīhā ī Zādspram* it was Ohrmazd who pre-emptively struck. When Ahriman came close to the border, Ohrmazd caused him to become stupefied with holy prayers and cast him back into the darkness and created many creatures in spirit to fight against Druj.[231] They were kept in a spiritual state for three thousand years and after three thousand years, Ahriman, who rose from the stupor and was able to create his own demonic army, once more came to the border and told Ohrmazd: "I will strike you and your creation and I will make them my friend and your enemy."[232]

According to *Vizīdagīhā ī Zādspram*, Ohrmazd knew that Ahriman was capable of carrying out his threats, if the period of strife were not limited by time. He therefore asked the deity of Time (Zamān, also known as Zurvān) to assist him. Zamān appointed three eras, each one consisting of three thousand years and Ahriman agreed to such terms.[233] Ohrmazd knew it was impossible to encircle Ahriman because he could return from the darkness anytime he desired with an army and harm His creation.[234] Later, Zamān helped Ohrmazd but also gave Ahriman an instrument of

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[229] Philippe Gignoux and Aḥmad Tafazzoli, eds. and trans., *Anthologie de Zādspram: Édition critique du texte pehlevi traduit et commenté*, Studia Iranica, Cahier 13 (Paris: Association pour l'Avancement des Études Iraniennes, 1993), 31.

[230] Gignoux and Tafazzoli, *Anthologie de Zādspram*, 31.

[231] Gignoux and Tafazzoli, *Anthologie de Zādspram*, 31.

[232] Gignoux and Tafazzoli, *Anthologie de Zādspram*, 31.

[233] Gignoux and Tafazzoli, *Anthologie de Zādspram*, 33.

[234] Gignoux and Tafazzoli, *Anthologie de Zādspram*, 33.

darkness with which he was able to bring darkness to the sky.[235] Two issues stand out in these passages which are fundamentally different from *Bundahišn*. First, the fact that Ohrmazd could not defeat Ahriman without the help of Zamān suggests that Ohrmazd was not omnipotent, and Ahriman was an invincible antagonist. Second, it revives the highly debatable and controversial Zurvanite notion that Zamān seems to be more powerful than both Ohrmazd and Ahriman, and both, in one way or another, needed his help.

According to *Vizīdagīhā ī Zādspram*, after Ohrmazd was assisted by Zamān, a strange thing occurred. Zamān fashioned a weapon made out of the darkness of Ahriman and then attached to it a force associated with himself.[236] He gave this weapon to Ahriman but warned him that if he did not honor his pact to fight Ohrmazd at the end of nine thousand years, the demon Āz would devour him with the help of the same weapon.[237] As the final act immediately after this conversation, Ahriman descended toward the starry sky and brought the darkness to it. It seems that *Vizīdagīhā ī Zādspram* is the only Pahlavi text in which it is openly stated that Zamān assisted Ahriman by providing him with a weapon. It remains a mystery as to why Zamān would commit such an act in defiance of Ohrmazd, but whatever the reason, this demonstrates that Ahriman was a prominent celestial being with powers bestowed upon him by Zamān.

Ahriman's attack on the prototype of Ohrmazd's creation was initially successful. He attacked water, plants, and the primordial cow, also known as the Soul of the Cow (MP *gōšurun*), and the first man, Gayōmart, who is often referred to as the luminous and holy man. According to the *Bundahišn*, one of the reasons that Ahriman fell into a stupor for three thousand years was

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[235] Gignoux and Tafazzoli, *Anthologie de Zādspram*, 33.
[236] Gignoux and Tafazzoli, *Anthologie de Zādspram*, 35.
[237] Gignoux and Tafazzoli, *Anthologie de Zādspram*, 35.

because he saw his own incompetence against Gayōmart.[238] Like the Qurʾanic story of the creation of Adam, the Pahlavi texts provide no reason as to why the first man was also holy and righteous. Was he holy and righteous simply because he was the first man? What meritorious act did he perform to be granted such a high honor?

There seem to be some inconsistencies in the Pahlavi literature regarding the sequence of events between Ohrmazd and Ahriman at the beginning of creation. As mentioned earlier, in primordial time, Ahriman was unaware of his ultimate demise at the hands of Ohrmazd. However, as *Bundahišn* states, after the two made the pact to do battle at a set time, Ohrmazd showed Ahriman his own final triumph, the powerlessness of the latter, destruction of the demons, resurrection of the dead, and the evil-free life of his creation for eternity.[239] When Ahriman saw all this, he fell back into darkness, having become stupefied for three thousand years. The most pressing question is why Ahriman, after seeing his own destruction and after knowing that all his efforts were going to be futile in the end, still persisted in carrying out his plans to attack the creation of Ohrmazd? Commentaries do not provide any answer to this question. This portrayal of Ahriman is contradictory. On the one hand, he is regarded as the master of deviousness, deceit, and shrewdness, and on the other hand, he is shown to be exceedingly stupid and a complete nitwit.

2.3.2 The Characteristics of Ahriman in Pahlavi Literature

Pahlavi sources depict Ahriman in a very tangible way. He is often called by his other name Gannāg Mēnog, which literally means "Stinking Spirit." It is said that the stench of Ahriman can be detected from miles away in Hell and that his voice is similar to "thunder and the cry of an ass,

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[238] Skjærvø, *Spirit of Zoroastrianism*, 96.
[239] Cereti and MacKenzie, "Except by Battle," 36; cf. Agostini and Thrope, *The Bundahišn*, 8.

and the cry of a lion, and the cry of a female camel, the cry of the lamenting voice of the righteous man when he is struck unjustly and he cries out."[240] According to the *Bundahišn*, he "never thinks, and never speaks and never does a righteous thing and he does not need the good of the creation of Ohrmazd."[241] He is the lord of darkness; therefore, he resided in endless darkness and fashioned his creations from the material darkness.[242]

In contrast, Ohrmazd is the lord of light, who "fashioned forth the 'form of fire' from endless light. And all creation also was created in the 'form of fire'."[243] Therefore fire became the most sacred element in Zoroastrianism as it is considered a deity, the son of Ohrmazd, and the representative of his divine essence on earth and in all of his creation. Throughout the ages, fire became so sanctified and sacred in Zoroastrianism that the simplest sign of disrespect to it carried the punishment of death for the transgressor. One can only imagine how baffling it must have been for a Zoroastrian convert to Islam after the Arab conquest to learn that not only the word "Hell" is called "the Fire"(*al-nār*) in Arabic, but also that Iblīs, the demonic counterpart of Ahriman, was made of blazing fire while the first man, Adam, was made out of putrid black mud. While light is always a positive element in the Qurʾan, fire is almost always associated with the punishments of Hell, with the sinners being called 'people of the Fire' (*aṣḥāb al-nār*) and finally, with Iblīs and Jinn being made out of fire.

Iranian Sufis however, appear to have synthesized the ideas from both Islam and Zoroastrianism and offered an innovative, albeit antinomian approach to the issue of the Devil.

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[240] Alan W. Williams, ed. and trans., *The Pahlavi Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg: Part II: Translation, Commentary and Pahlavi Text*, Historisk-filosofiske Meddelelser 60 (Copenhagen: Munksgard, 1990), 2:62.

[241] Cereti and MacKenzie, "Except by Battle," 41; cf. Agostini and Thrope, *Bundahišn*, 11.

[242] Cereti and MacKenzie, "Except by Battle," 39. cf. Agostini and Thrope, *Bundahišn*, 9.

[243] Cereti and MacKenzie, "Except by Battle," 39. cf. Agostini and Thrope, *Bundahišn*, 9–10.

They never disputed that Iblīs had been created out of fire, but instead of condemning his fiery nature, which in Islam is associated with Hell, they admired him and even elevated him to a divine status. Fire, the most holy element in Zoroastrianism, continued to be a source of divine essence on earth in the writings of many Iranian Sufis about Iblīs, who was made of fire, the purest of elements.

It is also repeatedly mentioned in many Pahlavi sources that while Ohrmazd was all knowing or omniscient, Ahriman was ignorant of future events and only had post-knowledge (i.e., knowledge of \events only after they happened). That is the main reason why he agreed to the pact with Ohrmazd. Yet there is evidence in some Pahlavi texts which contradict this notion. For instance, in many versions of the stories of the birth of Zoroaster, Ahriman did his best to harm his mother while she was pregnant with him and later the child, so that Zoroaster would not be born or would be killed shortly after he was born.[244] If Ahriman was incapable of seeing and predicting the future, then what prompted him to take such drastic measures by sending some of his best demons along with an army of fiends to kill a pregnant woman and her newborn baby?

Although it is not definitive, it seems that Ahriman was married to a demoness called Jeh, the primal "prostitute" who is the embodiment of feminine "evil." In the *Vizīdagīhā ī Zādspram*, there is a passage which affirms that when Ahriman first attacked the creation of Ohrmazd, Jeh accompanied him the way a wife might accompany her husband.[245] According to the *Bundahišn*, Jeh is also the daughter of Ahriman. It was Jeh who awakened Ahriman after three thousand years of lingering in his stupor and gave him assurances about corrupting the creation of Ohrmazd and specifically mankind. She told Ahriman:

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[244] Gignoux and Tafazzoli, *Anthologie de Zādspram*, 63–64.
[245] Gignoux and Tafazzoli, *Anthologie de Zādspram*, 121.

> "Get up, father! For during the battle, I will so harm the righteous man and the plowing cow that their lives will not be worth living. I will steal their glory. I will torment the waters, the earth, fire, plants, and all of Ohrmazd's creation."
>
> As she enumerated these evil deeds in detail, the Evil Spirit (i.e., Ahriman) was comforted. He awoke from his stupor, and kissed Jeh on her head. At that very moment, the filth called menstruation appeared on her body.[246]

The *Vizīdagīhā ī Zādspram* states that Ahriman copulated with his own daughter Jeh in order to pollute all the women in the world by menses, and through them pollute all men.[247] If one collates the data from the *Bundahišn* and the *Vizīdagīhā ī Zādspram*, it may be concluded that Jeh is both the daughter and wife of Ahriman. Jeh, who is Ahriman's wife, daughter, and Queen of Hell stands in complete dualistic contrast to one of the Ameša Spantas, namely Spentā Ārmaiti (MP *Spandārmad*), who is described in the Pahlavi sources as Ohrmazd's queen, daughter, and wife.[248] The union between Ohrmazd and his daughter-wife symbolized one of the most sacred sacraments of Zoroastrianism, namely consanguine marriage (*xwedodah*), prescribed as the most meritorious and holy deed by the Zoroastrians priesthood. What is remarkable is the notion that Ahriman here is shown to be a practitioner of *xwedodah*. What makes this portrayal more extraordinary is that in many Pahlavi texts, *xwedodah* is prescribed as the best act which repels and vanquishes Ahriman.

Chapter two of the *Vizīdagīhā ī Zādspram* provides another peculiar description of Ahriman. When describing the initial attack of Ahriman on the creation of Ohrmazd, it states: "In

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[246] Agostini and Thrope, *Bundahišn*, 29; cf. Behramgore Tehmuras Anklesaria, ed. and trans., *The Pahlavi Rivāyat of Āturfarnbag and Farnbag-srōs* (Bombay: P.K. Anklesaria at M.F. Cama Athornan Institute, 1969), 47.

[247] Gignoux and Tafazzoli, *Anthologie de Zādspram*, 121.

[248] *Encyclopædia Iranica*, s.v. "Jeh."

the midday… Ahriman came to the sky, blazing and burning (MP *tābishnīg ud sūzishnīg*)."[249] The stems of both verbs used in this passage, which later come into New Persian as *tābish* and *sūzish,* describes a fiery and luminous entity which is in absolute opposition to the dark and gloomy description of Ahriman in Zoroastrianism.

In regard to the garment of Ahriman in a passage in *Vizīdagīhā ī Zādspram*, it is stated that what Zurvān gave Ahriman in the beginning of creation was a charcoal-colored garment made out of darkness, and he made a pact with him and told him:

> This is that weapon which burns like fire and all creatures suffer by it and it is made up of essence of [demon] Āz. When nine thousand years come to an end, if you do not fulfill what you have agreed upon in the beginning concerning making all the corporeal world the enemy of Ohrmazd and your friend— [which is] your own belief about one primary origin, that is, whoever that is bountiful, is also the striker— then Āz will chew up you and your creation.[250]

The color of Ahriman's garb is an interesting anecdote because around the time of the composition of *Vizīdagīhā ī Zādspram*, a Persian Sufi by the name of ʿAyn al-Qużāt Hamadānī, whose writing on Iblīs will be discussed at length in later chapters, also talked about the black kilim that Iblīs wore with pride. The dark garment provided by Zurvān is also a weapon made out of fire which is put in the hand of Ahriman and can inflict suffering upon people. This, without doubt, indicates that Ahriman was provided both with a cloak and a weapon by Zurvān and therefore was tacitly given a mandate to undertake his duty as he promised before creation. The fact that his weapon is

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[249] Gignoux and Tafazzoli, *Anthologie de Zādspram*, 34–35.
[250] Gignoux and Tafazzoli, *Anthologie de Zādspram*, 122–23.

made up of fire (MP *ātaxsh*) is also an interesting choice given the extreme sanctity of this element in Zoroastrianism.

Pahlavi literature also sheds more light on the process of creation by Ahriman. After the initial confrontation and the pact, both deities gave materiality to their creation. As *Bundahišn* states:

> 47. The Evil Spirit fashioned forth his own creatures from material darkness, in the form of a frog, black, ashy, worthy of darkness (and) evil, like the most sinful natured *xrafstar*. 48. And from material self-will he fashioned forth the form of Waran [Lust], for he needed Waran.[251]

Scholars such as Shaul Shaked translated verse 48 as follows: "From material self-love he fashioned forth evil lust, in the shape of a wild beast, as is necessary for lust."[252] Antonio Panaino agrees with Shaked's translation and adds that the issue of self-love should be examined in light of two other passages from two Pahlavi sources. The first one occurs in the *Mēnōg ī Xrad* where it is stated that all the *daēva*s and noxious creatures were created as a result of the sodomy of Ahriman with himself.[253] This self-sodomy (MP *kūnmarzī-ī xwīsh*) is also attested in another Pahlavi text known as *Pahlavī Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādistān-i Dīnīg*, which states that "When the accursed Ahriman committed sodomy with himself, then it was more grievous than his committing it with the demons."[254]

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[251] Cereti and MacKenzie, "Except by Battle," 39. cf. Agostini and Thrope, *Bundahišn*, 9.

[252] Shaul Shaked, "Some Notes on Ahreman, the Evil Spirit, and His Creation," in *Studies in Mysticism and Religion Presented to Gershom G Scholem*, ed. R. J. Werblowsky and C.H. Wirszubski (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1967), 233.

[253] Tafażżulī, *Mīnū-yi Khirad*, 22.

[254] Williams, *Pahlavi Rivāyat*, 12.

As Panaino explains, the act of sodomy specifically, and homosexuality in general, was considered to be the creation of the Devil, because it was counterproductive to the plans of Ohrmazd who promoted fertility and procreation.[255] Although Panaino views the issue of creation by Ahriman, from a psychosexual perspective, as a result of his own self-love, one can see a remote parallelism with a Sufi maxim in which God states: "I was a hidden treasure; I loved to be revealed, therefore I created the creation." While from the Sufi perspective God's self-love spawned the entire creation, in Zoroastrianism, Ahriman's self-love is responsible for the creation of evil.

One of the attributes of Ahriman is invincibility. Many Pahlavi texts repeatedly state that Ahriman was put into a stupor, beaten, and ridden by legendary heroes. Yet none of them provide a definite explanation as to why he was not annihilated altogether. As we have seen in the *Bundahišn*, Ahriman initially was sent back into the darkness and remained in the state of stupor for three thousand years, but he was never completely defeated or annihilated. The most that Ohrmazd could do was to just put him into a stupor, but throughout the initial cosmic war, he remained unharmed. Other texts, such as *Dēnkard 5* for instance, argue that Ohrmazd could have defeated Ahriman if he wanted to, but it was impossible at the time.[256] The question of Ahriman's invincibility was also presented to Mardānfarrox, son of Ohrmazddāt, the author of a Pahlavi polemical text probably written in the 9th century called *Škand Gumānīk Vičār* (Doubt-dispelling exposition) . A questioner asked him: "Why does Ohrmazd, the creator, not prevent Ahriman from doing and wanting evil, when he has the power to do so? For if we say he cannot do it, [we can

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[255] Antonio Panaino, "Ahreman and Narcissus," in *Literarische Stoffe und ihre Gestaltung in mitteliranischer Zeit: Kolloquium anlässlich des 70. Geburtstages von Werner Sundermann*, ed. Desmond Durkin-Meisterernst, Christiane Reck, and Dieter Weber, Beiträge zur Iranistik, vol. 31 (Wiesbaden: Dr. Ludwig Reichert, 2009), 2.

[256] Zhāli Āmūzgār and Aḥmad Tafażżulī, eds. and trans., *Kitāb-i panjum-i Dīnkard* (Tehran: Muʿīn, 1386/2007), 81.

deduce that] it is because he is not perfect, and even he is powerless."[257] The answer that Mardānfarrox provides is not a convincing one, as he states the omnipotence of Ohrmazd is only about possible things, and he goes on to say that because the essence of Ahriman is evil there is no way that Ohrmazd will be able to change that.[258] This again raises the question of how and why an evil essence came into existence in the first place and why an omnipotent god was unable or unwilling to annihilate him once and for all.

2.3.3 Ahriman and the Netherworld

There are only a handful of Pahlavi sources that are thought to belong to the pre-Islamic era. Among them is the *Ardā Wīrāz Nāmag*, which is a tale of the journey of a man named Ardā Wīrāz to the netherworld and back. It contains some information about Ahriman and his state in the netherworld. According to the *Ardā Wīrāz Nāmag* Ahriman and his minions have their own religion, *dēn-i Ahriman*, and there are people who follow it.[259] While in general, any other religion besides Zoroastrianism was considered a demonic religion, to directly state that Ahriman had his own religion demonstrates that despite the fact that his worshippers were all wicked, he was a deity that was worthy of being worshipped.

In the *Ardā Wīrāz Nāmag,* Ahriman, along with his demons, is also introduced as the inflictor of various punishments for the sinful in Hell.[260] The abode of Ahriman was assumed to be in the north, which was also the direction of Hell. In most of the Avesta, wicked people have

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[257] Mardānfarrox-i Ohrmazddād, *Une apologétique mazdéenne du 9è siècle; Škand gumānīk vičār: La solution décisive des doutes*, ed. and trans. Pierre Jean de Menasce (Fribourg, CH: Librairie de l'Université de Fribourg, 1945), 38.

[258] Mardānfarrox, *Škand gumānīk vičār*, 38–40.

[259] Fereydun Vahman, ed. and trans., *Ardā Wirāz Nāmag: The Iranian 'Divina commedia'*, Scandinavian Institute of Asian Studies Monograph Series 53 (London: Curzon, 1986), 159, 212.

[260] Vahman, *Ardā Wirāz Nāmag*, 196.

always been portrayed as followers of the demons and they are often considered to be the helpers of Angra Mainyu. To depict Ahriman as the punisher of the sinners creates a dilemma in understanding the nature and function of the Devil. In Islamic eschatology, God created Hell as a punishment for sins committed against Him. In Zoroastrianism, however, Hell is not created by Ohrmazd, and Zoroastrian sources suggest that as an entirely good god, he has nothing to do with the pain and sufferings inflicted upon the sinful in Hell. Therefore, Hell is entirely the domain of Ahriman. Moreover, Ahriman, as the instigator and creator of sin, must be pleased to receive the sinners in Hell who were his supporters and helpers. Yet he is often depicted as the punisher of the sinners who obeyed him and rebelled again Ohrmazd. Does this suggest that, like Satan or Iblīs, Ahriman could have the role of divine punisher?

There are some passages in the *Ardā Wīrāz Nāmag* which hint that the *daēva*s, who in Middle Persian are called *dīv*s (demons), are indeed some sort of divine punishers. For instance, while traveling through Hell, Ardā Wīrāz witnessed that the body of a lazy man named Dawānūs was being devoured by reptiles, with the exception of his right foot. When he asked the reason why his right foot was speared, the deities who accompanied him explained: "Because he did not perform any good deed, but with his right foot he threw a bundle of grass in front of a ploughing ox."[261] Another example is when Ardā Wīrāz saw a man in Hell whose entire body, except for his right foot, was put into a boiling copper pot. The deities explained that this was a man who had illicit relations with other married women but with his right foot he killed many noxious animals like frogs and insects and that is why his right foot was not being subjected to punishment.[262] The vexing question is why these demons did not punish the foot which performed a meritorious act.

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[261] Vahman, *Ardā Wirāz Nāmag*, 204–5.
[262] Vahman, *Ardā Wirāz Nāmag*, 210.

After all, who do these demons really serve when they stop punishing the limb which did a meritorious deed?

At the end of the *Ardā Wīrāz Nāmag,* one has a clearer picture of what the role of Ahriman is in the afterlife. When Ardā Wīrāz visited the various sinners and witnessed their torments, he saw Ahriman, or the Stinking Spirit (*Gannāg Mīnūg*), and reported:

> Then I saw the Evil Spirit, full of death, destroyer of the world, of evil religion, who in Hell ever ridiculed and mocked the wicked ones and said to them: 'Why did you eat the bread of Ohrmazd and do my work, [and why] did you not think of your Creator, but fulfilled my wishes?' Thus, he screeched very scornfully at the wicked.[263]

This passage close to the end of the tale is the culmination of Ardā Wīrāz's journey through Hell and it contains several fascinating twists. First it is least suspected of Ahriman to be scornful and contemptuous of the sinners who obeyed his commands in this world. Even more intriguing is the fact that Ahriman himself admits that it was a gross transgression for the sinners to continue eating the bread of Ohrmazd and at the same time do his biddings (MP *che rāy nān ī Ohrmaz hamī xwarīd ud kār ī man kunīd*?). What is more impressive is the fact that several centuries after the composition of *Ardā Wīrāz Nāmag,* the exact same phrase was repeated in an aphorism of an early Persian Sufi called Mālik ibn Dīnār (d. ca. 130/748), who lamented: "I keep eating the bread of God and obeying the command of Satan (*nān-i khudāy mīkhuram wa farmān-i Shayṭān mībaram*)."[264] Moreover, the fact that Ahriman acknowledged that Ohrmazd was the creator of people and reprimanded the sinners for abandoning him and instead obeying the Devil's command,

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[263] Vahman, *Ardā Wirāz Nāmag*, 218.
[264] ʿAṭṭār, *Taẕkirat al-auliyāʾ*, 1:52.

shows a certain level of understanding of ethical principles and a sense of righteousness, which is rarely evident when it comes to the representation of Ahriman in the Pahlavi sources.

The most significant aspect of this passage takes us back to the earlier question: what is the role of Ahriman and his minions in Hell? This passage demonstrates that Ahriman is the enemy of his own followers, namely the sinners who forgot Ohrmazd's benevolence and abandoned Him to do the bidding of Ahriman. There is also a resemblance, as discussed in Chapter 1, between this passage and Q 14:22, in which Satan chastises the sinners in Hell for following his false promises instead of following God's promises and acknowledges the oneness of God. On the surface, it appears that in this particular case, Satan and Ahriman are both rooting for the wrong side. Yet perhaps it is not hard to see that, at some level, they serve the function of divine chastisers.

The abovementioned episode is not an isolated one in the Pahlavi literature. In the *Mēnōg ī Xrad* for instance, the episode is narrated in a different setting but with the same message. After the soul of a sinner is judged and condemned by the deity Rašn, he is taken by demons to Hell. There, the demons start to mock and ridicule the sinner, telling him:

> What was your problem and complaint with God Ohrmazd and the Ameša Spentas and the fragrant and blissful paradise that you wanted to visit and come near Ahriman and demons and the gloomy Hell; so that we torture you and do not grant you absolution, and you are going to suffer for a long time. Then Ganāg Mīnog (i.e., Ahriman) tells the demons: 'Do not ask him questions because he has separated from cherished body and had passed through an awful road. But bring him the worst and the foulest of foods; the food which is nurtured in Hell.'"[265]

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[265] Tafażżulī, *Mīnū-yi Khirad*, 16.

This passage even goes further in the chastisement of the sinners for their transgressions against Ohrmazd. The demons declare that He is God, and they admonish the sinners for choosing wrong over right, hence acknowledging that the way of Ohrmazd is the right way.

A recent study by Daniel Sheffield of a little-known late Pahlavi text called *Wizirgerd ī Dēnīg* reveals that considering Ahriman as the creation of Ohrmazd who has the duty of punishing sinners in Hell became an alternative tendency in post-classical Zoroastrian thought.[266] In *Wizirgerd ī Dēnīg*, the question is asked: "How and in what way did the wicked Evil Spirit become manifest? Is he the creation of Ohrmazd in the original creation, or did he become manifest on his own."[267] A sage responds:

> It is through that original creation that wicked Ahriman is the creation of Ohrmazd… if Lord Ohrmazd had not created Ahriman, who would exact punishment on the souls of the wicked ones in Hell?... Every punishment which is done to the souls in Hell is according to the command of Ohrmazd. There are some (who say it is) from the judgment of Ohrmazd. (If [?]) he acts too much through his own hatred, (then) the well-brandished mace comes over the wicked Ahriman and strikes him on the head, (so that) he cannot exact more punishment. Then, regarding (his) wisdom, one should know without doubt that the Evil Spirit is the servant and creation of Ohrmazd.[268]

While this Pahlavi source represents a clear departure from most of the traditional Zoroastrian theological doctrines regarding the reasons for the existence of Ahriman, it nevertheless answers two important inquiries which Zoroastrian sources answered ambiguously, namely how Ahriman

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[266] Daniel Jensen Sheffield, "The Wizirgerd ī Dēnīg and the Evil Spirit: Questions of Authenticity in Post-Classical Zoroastrianism," *Bulletin of the Asia Institute*, n.s., 19 (2005): 185.

[267] Sheffield, "Wizirgerd ī Dēnīg," 184.

[268] Sheffield, "Wizirgerd ī Dēnīg," 184–5.

came to exist in the first place and what his function was. This text answers both these questions by basically claiming that it was God himself who created Ahriman and who then chose him as the divine punisher of sinners, a position that is much closer to Abrahamic tradition, and to a certain extent, to Sufism.

The issue of the so called 'non-existence of Ahriman' has dogged exegetes and scholars. The issue is as follows: because Zoroastrianism is a dualistic religion, whatever Ohrmazd is, Ahriman is not. Therefore, while Ohrmazd is luminous, kind, just, benevolent, righteous, life-giving and essentially entirely good, Ahriman, in contrast, is dark, cruel, oppressive, malicious, deadly and entirely bad. However, based on this dualistic worldview, some Zoroastrian sources go to the extreme by claiming that because Ohrmazd does exist, Ahriman, who is the opposite of everything that Ohrmazd is, must be non-existent. It seems that *Ardā Wīrāz Nāmag* is one of the earliest Pahlavi sources that state that Ahriman is a non-existent being. The two deities, Sraoš and Ātar, who accompanied Ardā Wīrāz to the netherworld, told him:

> We shall show you the reward for the firm believers in Ohrmazd and the Archangels. And the goodness of Heaven, and the evil of Hell. And the existence of God and the Archangels and the non-existence of Ahriman and the demons (MP *nīstih-i Ahriman ud dīwān*)."[269]

This notion could stem from the fact that Ahriman is often called 'embodied death' (MP *hami tan marg*), and from this it follows that he must be the opposite of life and existence. The concept of the non-existence of Ahriman is also repeated in several other Pahlavi sources that came after *Ardā Wīrāz Nāmag.* For example, after describing the initial characteristics of Ahriman, the *Bundahišn*

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[269] Vahman, *Ardā Wirāz Nāmag*, 196.

states: "There are those who say he was not," thus hinting at the enigma that Ahriman is the non-existent antithesis of Ohrmazd.[270] Yet when the *Bundahišn* describes this issue in primordial time, after explaining that initially the two did not have any contact with each other, the text goes on to admit that Ohrmazd, by the power of His omniscience, knew that Ahriman existed.[271]

Both Ohrmazd and Ahriman are therefore assumed to be spiritual entities and hence neither of them can be seen. As Shaked explains, while Ohrmazd, in the material world, can be seen through his creation, there is nothing in the material world which represents Ahriman.[272] In other words, nothing can be assimilated to Ahriman as he has no corresponding worldly entity representing him. The significance of this assertion is better appreciated when one compares it to the attributes of God in Q 42:11: "There is nothing resembling Him" or Q 112:4: "And there is none comparable unto Him." To have the capacity of non-resemblance to anything is a unique feature that Iranian Sufis esteemed greatly as an attribute of God, and if Ahriman possessed such an attribute, it would be hard not to admire him.

The non-existence of Ahriman is also mentioned in various passages of *Dēnkard 6*. The significance of this issue is indicated in statements such as: "Every person should surrender himself to the gods three times a day, when the sun rises, and speak out the existence of the religion and the gods and the non-existence of Ahriman and the demons" or "Ahriman never existed and does not exist." [273] However, *Dēnkard 6* speaks of the issue of the non-existence of Ahriman from more of an ethical and less of a theological point of view, as it stresses the combat against Ahriman on a very personal level:

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[270] Cereti and MacKenzie, "Except by Battle," 33.
[271] Cereti and MacKenzie, "Except by Battle," 34; cf. Agostini and Thrope, *Bundahišn*, 6.
[272] Shaked, "Some Notes on Ahreman," 228–29.
[273] Āturpāt-i Ēmētān, *The Wisdom of the Sasanian Sages (Dēnkard 6)*. ed and trans. Shaul Shaked, Bibliotheca Persica, Persian Heritage Series 34 (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1979), 89, 109.

> It is possible to put Ahriman out of the world in this manner, namely, every person, for his own part, chases him out of his body, for the dwelling of Ahriman in the world is in the body of men. When he will have no dwelling in the bodies of men, he will be annihilated from the whole world; for as long as there is in this world dwelling even in a single person to a small demon, Ahriman is in the world… For when Ahriman is put out of the body of men he is annihilated from the whole world.[274]

This passage creates a better perspective to appreciate the concept of the non-existence of Ahriman from an ethical point of view. The fact that Ahriman's place is within all humans, points to the susceptibility of Ohrmazd's creation toward evil. It also shows that the only place that Ahriman can reside is within the self and that he has no real external representation. Ahriman, therefore, fits within the grand scheme of the creation that Ohrmazd or Zurvān had designed, and he is an inseparable and essential part of the cosmic order.

Pahlavi literature depicts the creation by Ahriman to be the cause of all evil in the world. Yet with all the negativity that it projects on Ahriman, the message it intends to convey is enigmatic. One example of this can be observed in chapter 13 of the *Pahlavī Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg* in which Ohrmazd admits that Ahriman's counter-creation, through unintended consequences, actually has been assisting Ohrmazd and His creation:

> 8. One of those (things is) when he [... Ahriman] created death, men died; (this was advantageous) for it is clear (that) if, greed, need, deceitfulness and strife had been created and people did not die of old age, it would have been necessary to kill, and all the people would have struggled and fought all day long with one another, and they

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[274] Āturpāt-i Ēmētān, *Wisdom of the Sasanian Sages*, 103.

> would have said this: "If we are not going to die, then we need more wealth," and then on account of fear of another (person) a (hiding) hole would have been necessary for everyone to preserve the body, and there would have been grievous harm for the existence of creatures. 9. One of those (things is) when (he dried up) water, for if there had not been a drying up (of water) it would have covered all this earth, and there would have been grievous harm from it. 10. One of those (things is) when he extinguished fire, for if fire had thus been burning, but (could) not be extinguished, fire would thus have covered all this world, then everyone would have had the fear of burning, and there would have been grievous harm and misfortune from it.[275]

The text indicates that Ohrmazd saw this as the result of the ignorance of Ahriman, for "if he had not created those things it would have been more advantageous for the wicked Ahriman and from him there would have been grievous injury to my creatures."[276] While this is a reference to the fact that even the evil of Ahriman might play a role in the cosmic order, Zoroastrian priests could not possibly envision that Ahriman might have been the necessary albeit malicious force, and therefore occasionally play a positive role. This idea however, was embraced and perfected by the Iranian Sufis who lived and preached their vision of the Devil in the same era as the composers and compilers of many of these Pahlavi texts.

Dēnkard 6, which is estimated to have been composed around the 10th century CE, is one of the few texts that describe the process of mixing Ahriman's evil with the creation of Ohrmazd as a benefit for the latter.[277] The *Mēnōg ī Xrad*, on the other hand, states that any good or evil that

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[275] Williams, *Pahlavi Rivāyat*, 23–24.
[276] Williams, *Pahlavi Rivāyat*, 23.
[277] Āmūzgār and Tafażżulī, *Kitāb-i panjum-i Dēnkard*, 82.

befalls people and other creatures comes from the seven planets and twelve stars.[278] This idea is later repeated in the *Persian Rivayāt* but with a new twist:

> It is so said in the book of *Bundahišn* that whatever reaches men is on account of the seven planets and the twelve constellations. There are Ohrmazdian stars and Ahrimanian stars. When Ohrmazd made a contract with Ahriman that each one should have his share divided in two, i.e., Ohrmazd should be in Garothman [Heaven] and Ahriman in Hell, they left action in the hands of the skies so that whatever of health and disease, or of affluence and poverty, or anything which happens unto men is on account of the revolution of the skies and the stars, but righteousness and wickedness arise from men's actions.[279]

The seven planets are the lieutenants (MP *spāhbad*) of Ahriman and the twelve stars are twelve army captains of Ohrmazd, and all the creatures will be defeated by the seven planets as they will all be handed over to death and suffering.[280] The *Mēnōg ī Xrad* goes even further and claims that these stars and planets decide the fate of the world.[281] When it comes to Ahriman, the fatalism is also demonstrated in the Pahlavi advice literature. For example, *Dēnkard 6* states that one's soul can be claimed by either Ohrmazd or Ahriman in a very arbitrary fashion:

> There were some people who asked: "Which spirit is that which carries a man from righteousness to sinfulness and from sinfulness to righteousness?" The priests said: "*Ragih.*" The righteous asked: "What is *Ragih* in the body of people? Is it the head, eye

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[278] Tafażżulī, *Mīnū-yi Khirad*, 26.

[279] Ervad Bamanji Nosserwanji Dhabhar, comp., *The Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framarz and Others* (Bombay: K. R. Cama Oriental Institute, 1932), 431.

[280] Tafażżulī, *Mīnū-yi Khirad*, 23.

[281] Tafażżulī, *Mīnū-yi Khirad*, 23.

> or ear?" The priests said: "*Ragih* is a thing in the body of men". The righteous did not know what *Ragih* was, and then there came wise men who said: "*Ragih* was made in every man, for *Ragih* is that which both Ohrmazd and Ahriman call, when it wills it goes after Ohrmazd the Lord, but when it wills (otherwise) it goes after Ahriman."[282]

More interesting is the choice of seven planets that are "lieutenants" of Ahriman. Seven doubtlessly is the most universally esoteric number. In Zoroastrianism, seven is the number of Ameša Spentas. In Sufism, seven has been the general source of inspiration as it became the number for one category of the Sufi saints called *autād*, who are seven anonymous men secretly in charge of administering the affairs of the world. The juxtaposition of the number seven with the seven lieutenants of Ahriman demonstrates that by the time of the composition of some of the late Pahlavi sources, the concept of Ahriman might have become esoteric and mysterious. In fact, texts such as the *Mēnōg ī Xrad*, in which the righteous poor-and-destitute individuals are abundantly praised and special attention is given to the transitory nature of the material world, resemble more a Sufi advice text than any orthodox Zoroastrian source.

Advices that are given in the *Mēnōg ī Xrad* are in sync with what Sufis espoused. For instance, when the sage asked the Spirit of Wisdom whether Ohrmazd created any creature that Ahriman is unable to harm, the Spirit of Wisdom responds that the person who is wise and content with what he has, is harmed less by Ahriman.[283] The notion of contentment (*riżā*) is one of the important tenets of Sufism. This Sufi concept is not limited to contentment with worldly possessions, as it advocates for contentment in the face of life's afflictions. This view is also mentioned in the *Mēnōg ī Xrad*: "The patience of a person is praiseworthy who can endure the

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[282] Āturpāt-i Ēmētān, *Wisdom of the Sasanian Sages*, 33.
[283] Tafażżulī, *Mīnū-yi Khirad*, 50.

wickedness and harm of Ahriman and demons happily and with open arms."[284] Also according to the *Mēnōg ī Xrad*, Ahriman does not believe that taking away a person's life, property, wife, children, and all the great joys of his life is truly harming the individual. The only time he thinks he genuinely harmed someone is when he steals and corrupts that person's soul.[285] Similarly, for many Sufis, loss of worldly possessions, including one's wife or children, was not considered an affliction; the real affliction occurred when the Devil tested one's faith.

In categorizing the different kind of humans, the *Mēnōg ī Xrad* names the half-demon (MP *nīmdīv*), who resembles other people but in action and demeanor is more of a demon than a human, as the basest of mankind. Persian Sufis like Rūmī had sometimes emphasized the fact that there are many human-faced Iblīses who are to be avoided.[286] That being said, the actions of these so called half-demon humans, described in the *Mēnōg ī Xrad*, are somewhat similar to the practices of many antinomian Sufis who also admired the Devil. As the *Mēnōg ī Xrad* explains, these half-demon humans "do not care for the material world nor for the netherworld, they do not know any good deed or sin, do not care for Paradise or Hell and do not bring into account even their own soul."[287] There are countless examples, both in poetry and prose, of such belief among the antinomian Sufis who did not care for Paradise or Hell, and equated unbelief (*kufr*) with faith (*īmān*). Some Sufis from the *Malāmatiyya* sect committed sinful acts in public so that people would view them as sinners, believing that in this way they would be able to subdue their pride and ego. While it is obvious that what the *Mēnōg ī Xrad* is referring to here has little to do with

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[284] Tafażżulī, *Mīnū-yi Khirad*, 56.

[285] Tafażżulī, *Mīnū-yi Khirad*, 59.

[286] Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Balkhī Rūmī, (*Kitāb-i) Maṯnavī-yi maʿnavī*, ed. Reynold Nicholson. 6 bks. in 3 vols. (Leiden: Trustees of the E. J. W. Gibb Memorial, 1925–33); rep. ed., with preface and notes in one volume by Mahdī Āẕar Yazdī Khurramshāhī (Tehran: Pajūhish, 1377/1998), bk. 1, line 316, p. 18. All the page references are to the 1377/1998 edition.

[287] Tafażżulī, *Mīnū-yi Khirad*, 59.

Malāmatiyya or antinomian Sufis, to call such people "half-demon" and the lowest type of man in the category of humanity would have been considered a great epithet for many of those heterodox Sufis who would have accepted such titles with honor.

There is also contrast between what the Zoroastrian priesthood portrayed as an Ahrimanic act and what Sufis considered as a virtue. For instance, in a chapter concerning charity, the *Pahlavī Rivāyat Accompanying the Dādestān ī Dēnīg* states:

> This also (is) revealed in the religion, that Ohrmazd said to Zoroaster: "He who performs charity knowingly and discriminately (is) like me, I who am Ohrmazd. And he who performs charity ignorantly and without understanding and indiscriminately (is like) Ahriman. ….. he who gives something to a sinner, and does not know that he is sinful, when he comes to know that he is sinful, then he must take it [i.e., the gift] back…… For the sake of all men I [Ohrmazd] say to you who are Zoroaster that the Hell of darkness belongs to those who give charity to the wicked.[288]

This so-called ignorant and indiscriminate giving of charity refers to the fact that Zoroastrians frowned upon giving charity to non-Zoroastrians, who in their view were wicked followers of Druj (MP *durwand*); and in some cases, to give charity in such manner was considered an Ahrimanic act. In one of the later Zoroastrian texts in New Persian called *Rivāyāt-i Dārāb Hormazdyār*, relating from a Zoroastrian priest named Kama Bohra, it states that to give food or drink to any sinner carries the penalty of 'being worthy of death' (*marg-arzān*) and such an act was compared to putting food in the mouth of a dragon.[289] When it came to giving provisions to the poor and

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[288] Williams, *Pahlavi Rivāyat*, 21, 23.

[289] Ervad Manockji Rustamji Unvālā, ed. and trans., *Rivāyāt-i Dārāb Hormazdyār*, 2 vols. (Bombay: British Indian Press, 1922), 1:346.

needy, many Iranian Sufis paid no attention to religious affiliation. As Shafiʿī Kadkanī indicates at the front gate of the Sufi lodge of the great Persian mystic Abū al-Ḥasan Kharaqānī (d. 425/1033), an aphorism was written which said: "Whoever enters give him food and do not ask for his religion for whoever is worthy of life in God's eyes, is worthy of food in Abū al-Ḥasan's eyes."[290] If giving food to a nonbeliever was considered the work of the Devil, then Iranian Sufis would gladly embrace such an act and also the deity to whom it was attributed.

Yet there are other Pahlavi sources that are completely in line with the Sufis' worldview. The occurrences of mystical aphorisms in the *Dēnkard 6* are so frequent that one might mistakenly assume that it was a manual of Sufi ethics. One of the most common themes that *Dēnkard 6* shares with Sufism is its exaltation of poverty. In one passage, *Dēnkard 6* states:

> Poverty is best, make provision of it. Stand firm in poverty, which is the best thing. A man who stands in poverty not out of constraint but solely because of the goodness and praise of poverty banishes Ahriman and the demons from the world… He can stand in poverty who has more joy in the scantest substance which is necessary for the body than in the bulkiest substance.[291]

This passage of *Dēnkard 6* resonates with anyone who is familiar with one of Rūmī's *ghazals* in which he anthropomorphizes poverty and glorifies its beauty and magnificence. [292] This type of adoration of poverty, which is rarely seen in other Pahlavi sources, greatly resembles one of the tenets of Sufism, called by the same word, "poverty" (*faqr*). What makes passages such as these

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[290] Muḥammad Riżā Shafīʿī Kadkanī, *Nivishta bar daryā: Az mīrāṣ-i ʿirfānī-yi Abū al-Ḥasan Kharaqānī* (Tehran: Sukhan, 1384/2006), 76.

[291] Āturpāt-i Ēmētān, *Wisdom of the Sasanian Sages*, 57.

[292] Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Balkhī Rūmī, (*Kulliyāt-i*) *Dīvān-i Shams-i Tabrīzī*, ed. Badīʿ al-Zamān Furūzānfar, 10th ed. (Tehran, Amīr Kabīr, 1362/1983), no. 2015, p. 757.

even more intriguing is the use of the Middle Persian word *driyōš* (poor) and *driyōšīh* (poverty), which have their root in the Avestan word *dregu*, i.e., people who are said to be the followers of Zoroaster. While in early Sufism, the Arabic term *faqīr (*poor*)* and *faqr* (poverty) were used, Persian Sufis instead began to adopt its New Persian equivalent, *darvīsh* and *darvīshī*. The New Persian word *darvīshī* not only means poverty, but in time, it became synonymous with the state of being a Sufi, or Sufihood. As an important tenet of Sufism, the concept of perpetual physical and spiritual *darvīshī* was considered one of the best ways to put down the ego and stop the temptations of the Satan.

Like Sufi manuals, *Dēnkard 6* also prescribes *driyōšīh* as a way to salvation of the soul for the seeker but warns that not everyone is capable of treading such a difficult path, because the voluntary act of stepping onto the way which repels Ahriman must be done with complete joy and contentment:

> When a thing comes about the remedy of which, for the love of the soul, is to be happy in poverty, one should willingly step into poverty, because the comfort of the body and the security and freedom from Reckoning for the soul occur from it. That man can step into poverty who derives more joy from things of least substance necessary for the preservation of the body than from those of most substance. A man who is not like this cannot step into poverty. A man, who steps into poverty not out of constraint but for the sake of the benefit which accrues from it, drives out of the world, for his own part, Ahriman and his misbegotten creatures. There cannot be in him at any moment anything which (leads to) the damnation of the soul and the ill-fame of the body.[293]

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[293] Āturpāt-i Ēmētān, *Wisdom of the Sasanian Sages*, 197–99.

> Like Sufis, the author of the *Dēnkard 6* saw the worldly trials and calamity created by Ahriman as a way of purifying the soul. An example of this idea is found in *Dēnkard 6* which promotes enduring the hardship inflicted by Ahriman as a path to deliverance in the hereafter:
>
> Wehdād, son of Ādur-Ohrmazd, who was chief priest, came to a certain place and saw two priests who were carrying on their backs firewood from a mountain, and who were weary, and were reciting Avestā and Zand in unison. He asked them: "As you appear to be performers of pious deeds and capable, for what purpose do you do a work of this nature?" They said in reply: "We heard that every person must undergo the discomfort created by Ahriman, according to (his) degree, at one place, either in the material world or in the spiritual world. It seems to us better if we undergo our share in the material world… than undergo (our share of discomfort) in the spiritual world, in Hell.[294]

This clearly depicts Ahriman not only as a divine punisher but also as an agent whose purpose is to purify the soul of the believer so that by enduring the calamities of this world created by Ahriman, he will be cleansed and can take pleasure in the delights of the hereafter.

One of the best examples of the shared values of Sufis and Zoroastrian sages can be seen in two tales, one mentioned in the *Dēnkard 6* and a similar one recounted in the *Taẕkirat al-auliyāʾ*, the Persian Sufi hagiography by Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār. By comparing these two tales, one can assume that when it came to the idea of the Devil, there must have been an exchange of ideas between the Zoroastrians sages and the Iranian Sufis. The anecdotes in *Dēnkard 6* paint a rather peculiar picture of Ahriman and how he causes calamity to good men:

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[294] Āturpāt-i Ēmētān, *Wisdom of the Sasanian Sages*, 181–3.

> Ādurbād, son of Mahraspand, said: Never has a misfortune come to me out of which I have not obtained joy in six ways. The first one is this: I am thankful that this is my misfortune, for it might have been worse than this. The second one is this: One of the misfortunes held in store for me is passed. The third one is this: Misfortune has come not to my soul but to my body; for it is possible to endure it in the body more easily than in the soul. The fourth one is this: I am thankful that I am so good a man that the accursed Ahriman brought this misfortune upon me because of my goodness. The fifth one is this: Every evil or misfortune done comes either to oneself or to one's descendants; it has come to me and will not come to my descendants. The sixth one is this: The store of Ahriman is full of misfortune which he keeps for good people; whatever has come to me has reduced the store of Ahriman, and he will not be able again to do it to a good man.[295]

Here Ahriman is depicted as a designated agent, in charge of delivering misfortune to good people from his own personal cache, and he is particularly keen to go after the righteous individuals. This last point is very similar to the story of Job in the Old Testament and therefore Ahriman's role could be described as being similar to that of Satan. Although the tale in ʿAṭṭār's *Taẕkirat al-auliyāʾ* does not mention the name of Ahriman or Iblīs, the similarity between the two tales suggests that ʿAṭṭār must have heard the story from a Zoroastrian source. The tale is about the great Persian Sufi Aḥmad ibn Ḥarb b. Pirūz Nīshābūrī (d. ca. 234/848) (probably of Zoroastrian heritage):

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[295] Āturpāt-i Ēmētān, *Wisdom of the Sasanian Sages*, 131–2.

> It is said that Aḥmad had a Zoroastrian neighbor called Wahrām who one day sent his trade partner away on a business trip [with some money], but the money, which was a large sum, was stolen by the bandits. When the Shaykh (i.e., Aḥmad) heard the news, he told his pupils "Let us go and console our neighbor to whom such calamity has befallen; and though he is a Zoroastrian, but nevertheless he is a neighbour."
>
> When they arrived at his house, Wahrām was busy burning the Zoroastrian fire. He ran to welcome them and kissed Aḥmad's robe. Aḥmad went in and sat down. Then Wahrām thought to himself 'what if they are hungry and came for food and there is little food in the house.' The Shaykh realizing Wahrām's distress said: "Do not be concerned. We came to console you as we heard your money was stolen."
>
> The Zoroastrian (i.e., Wahrām) said: "Yes. It is true. But I still must give thanks to God for three things: First, that they have stolen it from me and I did not steal from others, second, they only took half and the other half remains here for my daily needs, and thirdly, that my Zoroastrian religion remains with me, the worldly possessions come and go.
>
> Upon hearing this Aḥmad was amazed. He said to his pupils: "Write these down as this saying carries the scent of Muslim-hood."[296]

The similarities between these two tales demonstrate that in cities like Nīshābūr which had a sizable Zoroastrian population, there was a steady interaction and exchange of ideas between Sufis and Zoroastrians. Sufis had little problem in seeing the merit and value in the words and actions of anyone, including non-Muslims, and then adopting those ideas into their own maxima and

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[296] ʿAṭṭār, *Taẕkirat al-auliyāʾ*, 1:295.

aphorisms. Therefore, it must not come as a surprise that many of the Persian Sufi authors used the word "Ahriman" in their writing whenever they referred to Iblīs.

2.3.4 *Škand Gumānīk Vičār*

One of the few Zoroastrian Pahlavi polemical sources, *Škand Gumānīk Vičār* has an extensive argument regarding the falsehood of other religions and their concept of theodicy. By the time Mardānfarrox ī Ohrmazddātān composed it probably around the end of the 9th century, Zoroastrian laymen began to ask questions about the nature of Ohrmazd and Ahriman's relationship.[297] Questions such as:

> I always observe that everything is all done by the celestial sphere (MP *spihr*) and stars; therefore, he who created this sphere is the same as the one who the Believers say he has created good and evil. If Ahriman created these marvelous things, [then] how was he able to create them? As there are stars by which grant happiness and prosperity. If Ohrmazd and Ahriman created [them] in consultation with each other, then so it is obvious that, Ohrmazd is the accomplice and partner of Ahriman, in the sin and evil which emanates from celestial sphere.[298]

This shows that Zoroastrian laymen, like their Muslim counterparts, did not readily accept the orthodox narrative about the Devil. As Enrico Raffaelli rightly notes, even the author of *Škand Gumānīk Vičār* "was clearly at pains to respect orthodox Zoroastrian ideas."[299] The flourishing

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[297] Samuel Thrope, "Unnecessary Angels: Jewish Angelology in the Škand Gumānīg Wizār," *Iranian Studies* 48, no. 1 (2015): 33–34.

[298] Mardānfarrox, *Škand Gumānīk Vičār*, 50.

[299] Enrico G. Raffaelli, "The Astrological Chapter of the *Škand Gumanīg Wizar*," in *Kayd: Studies in History of Mathematics, Astronomy and Astrology in Memory of David Pingree*, ed. Gherardo Gnoli and Antonio Panaino (Rome: Istituto Italiano per l'Africa e l'Oriente, 2009), 124.

intellectual atmosphere of the 3rd/9th century, which encouraged debates and even criticism of the dogma of all religions and creeds, including Islam, provided many, including the Zoroastrian clergy, the opportunity to develop their polemical literature which resulted in the composition of several polemical texts, including *Škand Gumānīk Vičār* and *Matikān Gujistak Abāliš*. However, *Škand Gumānīk Vičār* goes above and beyond simple polemic and actually criticizes the tenets of Abrahamic theology. A fascinating passage contains an interesting rebuttal to the Qurʾanic story of Iblīs:

> When the Creator made the first angel [i.e., Iblīs], on account of reverence, out of fire; for several thousand years, as they say, he [Iblīs] worshiped Him. At last, he [Iblīs] disobeyed one command that was given by him [God] that: "Pray (MP *namāẑ)* to the first man [i.e., Adam] whom I made out of clay!" He [i.e., Iblīs] apologized by giving reasons for his refusal to pray [to Adam]. Then, He, [i.e., God] by mud, and wrath, and curse, humiliated him.[300] And turned him into a demon and a devil, and expelled him out of paradise, and gave him several millennia of life and eternal lordship. So that [Iblīs said]: "I will go and make my servants and worshippers astray and deluded." And He [i.e., God] made what destroys and counteracts His own will.
>
> Later on, because of his honor and dignity, the man [i.e., Adam], whom the highest angel as well as many other worshippers were commanded to worship, was put in the garden of Paradise, so that he may cultivate and eat all of its fruits, except of that one tree of which He ordered him: "Do not eat." And with them [i.e., Adam and Eve],

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[300] de Menasce states that this phrase, in verse 56, is difficult to interpret and as he indicates he translates it based on his own assumption that in order for the phrase to make sense, the word clay (MP *gil*), must be replaced with the word lie (MP *drōg*).

He created a deceiver and seducer, and let him into the Garden. Some say he is a snake, and some say he is Ahriman. God himself gave to men the temperament to eat and be voracious.

Then they were deceived by this seducer who told them: “Eat from this [forbidden] tree.” Some say it was Adam. And they, because of their natural appetite, ate it. Having eaten, they became so knowledgeable, and they could recognize good and evil. Because of that one commandment which they forgot, He deprived him of that respect and honour. And He [i.e., God] Himself was the cause of that forgetfulness. And He [i.e., God] expelled him with his wife out of the Garden of Paradise by grievous wrath and reproach, and delivered them to the hands of the enemy who is the deceiver and seducer, to impose his own will on them and to gain control of them.

Now, which injustice, unreasonable order, slowness-in-wisdom, and little knowledge are more erroneous and more appalling than this? Moreover, why did not He [i.e., God] make that garden so fortified and impregnable that that seducer could not have gone into it? Henceforth, he [the seducer] has seduced and continues to seduce many servants and worshippers [of God]. And, for this reason [God] has sent, from time to time, many apostles and prophets to the world, so that: “They may save my servants from the hands of that seducer, and bring them into the straight path.” The apostles and prophets whose task was the bringing of humanity into the straight were all slain by a horrible death and destroyed by His [God’s] own will, [yet] the principal seducer and beguiler is left to live eternally, and till now his will to seduce and lead

> astray is more victorious and effective than that of God. Because, those seduced and led astray are far more numerous than those in the right way and not seduced. [301]

When discussing the mystery of the Qurʾanic story of Iblīs in Chapter 1, many of the issues raised by Mardānfarrox were also discussed. Interestingly enough, the multiplicity of the conundrums which are mentioned in this passage have also been the subject of questions for many Sufis. What is even more remarkable is the deference by which the author of *Škand Gumānīk Vičār* speaks about Iblīs. Mardānfarrox must have had deep knowledge of both Qurʾanic commentary and the legends of the prophets (*qiṣaṣ*) to compose the story of Iblīs with such keen attention to detail. After all, not all sources name Iblīs as the supreme angel and there has been a lively and inconclusive debate among Muslim exegetes over whether it was Satan or the snake who deceived Adam and Eve in the Garden.

Although perhaps unintentional, the praise that Mardānfarrox gives Iblīs is almost identical to those given him by the Iranian Sufis. He asks the very same questions that many Muslim theologians might have contemplated but did not dare to ask. For instance, he objects to the following issue with regard to the nature of theodicy in Islam:

> Since all things, in the world, are not outside of these two categories of good and evil, if it is said that good and evil both proceed from God and are by God's will, then the poor (MP *mustamand*) Ahriman who is not sinful, nor the principal actor of evil, and never was, nor will be evil and disobedient, is [therefore] unreasonably defamed. That which is mentioned in their book [i.e., Qurʾan] that Ahriman became defiant, and they put him out of Paradise is absurd, as it stands that rebellion and disobedience were

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[301] Mardānfarrox, *Škand Gumānīk Vičār*, 130–3.

> likewise out of God's will. Even if it is said 'The good comes from God, and out of God's will, and the evil from man,' then it is absurd to curse and despise Ahriman, because he is sinless and not the principle of evil. If all this malice and evil come not from different essences, but from the very essence of God himself who has one essence, then God is his own enemy and antagonist…. If it is said that evil and sin come from Ahriman or men, as long as they come from the producer and the creator who is God, then (it must be concluded that) the root cause of evil [i.e., God] is worse than evil.[302]

In this passage, Mardānfarrox, once more, states that Iblīs was innocent and his banishment from heaven was unjust. The thought-provoking point is that while the author is talking about Iblīs, he uses the word "Ahriman" instead. This might demonstrate that as early as the 3rd/9th century, the word Ahriman and Iblīs were used interchangeably in Persian literature, and they began to mean the same thing. What is remarkable is the fact that this Middle Persian Zoroastrian polemical text, which was written in part to refute Islamic theology, is the first Persian source which openly defends Iblīs as a supreme angel who was an honest servant of God but was rejected and banished unjustly.

In his polemic, Mardānfarrox goes even further and suggests that by letting Iblīs exist, God himself became the source of all evil. He cites what appears to him as contradictory statements in the Qurʾan and concludes that ultimately God was in cahoots with Iblīs:

> In their scriptures [i.e., Qurʾan], concerning the meritorious and sinful acts, there are contradictory statements, [for example God states]: "meritorious and sinful deeds both come from me. Neither demons, nor sorcerers are capable to harm anyone; no one

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[302] Mardānfarrox, *Škand Gumānīk Vičār*, 144–46.

> accepts the good religion or does good deeds, and no receives the bad religion and do harm, except by my will" …. Elsewhere, he states: "I myself mislead people. For if I will, I would show them the right path, but it is my will that they go to Hell." And in another one he states: "It is the men themselves who do evil."
>
> In these three manners, God gives different expressions about his creatures: One is this that he himself is Ahriman. One is this that he is himself the seducer of the creatures. On the other hand, he is in partnership with Ahriman in seducing the creatures, as He states: "Sometimes I do [the seducing] and sometimes Ahriman does." … Further: If the evil in thoughts and action of men is in accordance to God's will, then God created the evil in thought and sowed the seed of evil in their mind; Ahriman merely invites and incites them to commit evil, then the evil thought, which is out of God and His desire, is even stronger and worse than the invitation of Ahriman… therefore God is much worse and more sinful than Ahriman. [303]

In chapter 12 of *Škand Gumānīk Vičār*, Mardānfarrox aimed his polemic against Muslim theology and continued to condemn God and defend the innocence of Iblīs, whom he calls Ahriman throughout the text:

> An innocent [i.e., Iblīs] was created by Him [i.e., God] to be condemned to Hell yet He is not the oppressor… He [i.e., God], on the account of his own sinfulness, punishes his innocent servant [i.e., Iblīs]. He made his unique friend (MP *Dōst i ēugānaa i xvēš*) [i.e., Iblīs] weak, deprived, sinful, and seduced. [On account of His] wrath on one

[303] Mardānfarrox, *Škand Gumānīk Vičār*, 146, 154.

> sinless servant, namely Ahriman, He makes His own countless creatures bewildered and astray.[304]

While these claims would have been considered blasphemous to orthodox Muslim theologians, for the Iranians Sufis who shared many of the same sentiments and concerns, these ideas simply presented an opportunity and a platform from which they could present their own heterodox and esoteric ideas regarding the relationship between God and the Devil. Therefore, *Škand Gumānīk Vičār* can be viewed as the unintended pioneer and precursor to Persian mystical Iblisology.

2.4 Ahriman in the New Persian Zoroastrian Sources

By the time the Zoroastrians began writing their religious texts in New Persian, the name of Ahriman and Iblīs often started to be used interchangeably. The first such text is the *Zarātusht-nāma* which according to Christian Rempis is considered to be one of the oldest New Persian Zoroastrian texts.[305] While the word "Iblīs" is mentioned only once in the *Zarātusht-nāma*, Hell is described as a fiery place which is the residence of Ahriman.[306] In the later literature, including some of the *Persian Rivāyat*s, the name of Iblīs or Satan was sometimes used interchangeably with the name of Ahriman.[307] On one particular occasion, there is a poetic rendition of the story of the mythical king/hero Tahmuras, who, as mentioned earlier, captured and rode Ahriman in the form of a horse, for thirty years. Surprisingly, in the title of this section in the *Persian Rivāyats* there is no mention of the name of Ahriman. Instead it reads: "Concerning the snaring of Iblīs at the hands

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[304] Mardānfarrox, *Škand Gumānīk Vičār*, 168.

[305] Christian H. Rempis, "Qui est l'auteur de Zartusht-Nāmeh," in *Melanges d'Orientalisme offerts à Henri Masse à l'occasion de son 75e anniversaire* (Tehran: Imprimerie de l'Université de Tehran, 1342/1963), 340–41.

[306] Zartusht Bahrām Pazhdū, *Zarātushtnāma*, ed. Frederic Rosenberg, rev. Muḥammad Dabīr-Siyāqī (Tehran: Ṭahūrī, 1338/1959), 37.

[307] Unvālā, *Rivāyāt-i Dārāb Hormazyār*, 1:342.

of Tahmuras…"[308] In the story that follows, the name of Ahriman is also replaced with Iblīs and in fact when referring to Ahriman, the name Iblīs is mentioned more often than the name Ahriman.[309] It seems that by the time the *Persian Rivāyat*s were compiled, the Zoroastrian priesthood in Iran saw little distinction between the Islamic concept of the Devil and its counterpart in Zoroastrianism.

Perhaps the best example of this assimilation can be seen in another polemical treatise called *ʿUlamā-yi Islām*, in which a Zoroastrians priest tries to demonstrate the theological fallacies in other religions, and especially in Islam. In one of the questions, the priest asked: "The afflictions which are in this world, from whom do all these proceed and whence come these? If they say that it is not the work of Iblīs they must say whose work this is."[310] However in the rest of the treatise the name Iblīs is not mentioned and instead the author refers many times to Ahriman, whom he claims is often helped by Time (*Zamān*):

> Ahriman also is called by some name by some people, and they ascribe evil unto him but nothing can also be done by him without Time. It is a wonderful thing that they practice evil deeds on this computation, but it is improper that he should be called Evil.[311]

The text also suggests that God had left Ahriman in charge of all the evil in the world: "Zartosht Asfantaman says that there is Ahriman to whose care, God the most High, has left every vice, non-existence and wickedness up to the resurrection; and until the world and the people of

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[308] Unvālā, *Rivāyāt-i Dārāb Hormazdyār*, 1:311.
[309] Unvālā, *Rivāyāt-i Dārāb Hormazdyār*, 1:312–15.
[310] Dhabhar, *Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framarz*, 439.
[311] Dhabhar, *Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framarz*, 443.

the world exist, he (Ahriman) will be the butt of anathema."[312] One interpretation of these statements is that Ahriman was given carte blanche by Zamān or Ohrmazd to do all sorts of evil in the world. It is evident that by the time of the compilation of the *ʿUlamā-yi Islām*, and perhaps due to influence of Islamic Iblisology, Zoroastrianism had come to accept the fact that Ahriman might have had various names and even different attributes, some of which were not condoned or sanctioned by the Zoroastrian priesthood, lest it lose its firm control over matters of religious orthodoxy.

The best examples of these non-Zoroastrian attributes of Ahriman can be seen in another rendition of the same work, called *ʿUlamā-yi Islām II*.[313] In one passage, after describing the cosmological battle between Ohrmazd and Ahriman and the devastation that was caused by the latter, the text provides an account that is not found in any other Zoroastrian source:

> The wicked Ahriman began to stir and perforated the sky, the mountain and the earth, and rushed forth into the world, and whatever there was in the world, he polluted with his own wickedness and filth… [Then] The heavens rent asunder and the [beneficent] spirits (*mīnūān*) came to the assistance of the world. They seized the seven worst demons, carried them to the celestial sphere and bound them there with a spiritual chain…. Then they caught hold of Ahriman and carried him to Hell from the very hole through which he had penetrated the world and they bound him (there) with a spiritual chain. Two angels, the Amešaspand Ardibehesht and the Yazad Bahrām, have stood over him as guardians.[314]

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[312] Dhabhar, *Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framarz*, 447.
[313] Giulio Colapaoli, "The *ʿUlamā-yi Islām II*: An Open Question," *Eurasian Studies* 4, no.1 (2005): 75–77.
[314] Dhabhar, *Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framarz*, 451–52.

This version of the cosmic battle between Ahriman and angels has more similarity to Jewish pseudepigraphical works such as *The Life of Adam and Eve* and also to some Islamic legends mentioned in the Qurʾanic commentaries about Iblīs, than to any other Zoroastrian text, clearly demonstrating the influence of the Abrahamic tradition on the demonology of late Zoroastrianism. The author of *ʿUlamā-yi Islām II* also acknowledges that there have been several hypotheses by different sects about the nature of the creation of Ahriman. In one passage, he states:

> At the very beginning, both Ohrmazd and Ahriman have been produced from Time [*Zamān*] and every sect speaks of this in a different manner. One sect says that Ahriman was created (by Time) for this reason that Ohrmazd may know that Time is all-powerful over all things. Another sect says that it was not necessary to create him (i.e., Ahriman). He (i.e., Ahriman) said to Ohrmazd: "I can do such (evil) things and therefore it is not necessary to attribute evil unto Ohrmazd or unto me." Another says what pain or pleasure has Time from the evil of Ahriman or the good of Ohrmazd? One sect says that Ohrmazd and Ahriman were created (by Time) so that it (i.e., Time) may mix up good and evil and various things may be produced thereby. One sect says that Ahriman was an esteemed angel but on account of his disobedience he was made a butt of imprecations.[315]

There are endless debates about the date of composition of *ʿUlamā-yi Islām II*, which ranges from the early 7th/13th to the 10th/16th centuries.[316] While it is clearly a Zurvanite text, nonetheless to a degree it reflects the new attitude of post-classical Zoroastrianism, especially when it comes to

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[315] Dhabhar, *Persian Rivayats of Hormazyar Framarz*, 452–53.
[316] Colapaoli, "'*Ulamā-yi Islām II*," 77–80.

the thorny issue of Ahriman's cosmological role as a designated agent of the Divine. It also reveals that Zoroastrians started to be inclined to accept and even adopt different versions of the story of creation in which Ahriman could have been a created agent who, like Iblīs, served a specific purpose.

Based on both Pahlavi and New Persian Zoroastrian sources, it seems that Albert de Jong's theory that demons started to disappear from the Zoroastrian sources by the advent of Islam has some merit.[317] In Pahlavi and New Persian Zoroastrian sources, the number of demons decreases. Yet throughout those sources, demons, and chief among them Ahriman, played a significant role so much so that it is not farfetched to propose that the cosmological as well as eschatological role of the Zoroastrian devil, is, in large part, the creation of post-Avestan Zoroastrian literature.

2.5 **Conclusion**

The mysterious personality of Angra Mainyu in the Avesta, his metamorphosis into Ahriman in the Pahlavi and New Persian sources, and the influence that it directly and indirectly had on Persian mystical literature, requires further study, and this chapter was an attempt to begin this much-needed discussion. Most of the Sufis who admired Iblīs were Iranians who came from or lived in milieus where the Zoroastrian doctrines about Ahriman, both orthodox and heterodox, were prevalent. Some who spoke about the positive role of Iblīs, such as Bāyazīd Basṭāmī, al-Ḥallāj were descendants of Zoroastrians, while others, such as the martyred Sufi ʿAyn-al-Qużāt Hamadānī, knew the Pahlavi sources and were well versed in pre-Islamic Persian legends. When

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[317] Albert de Jong, "Going, Going, Gone! The Fate of the Demons in Late Sasanian and Early Islamic Zoroastrianism," in *Démons iraniens: Actes du colloque international organisé à l'Université de Liège les 5 et 6 février 2009 à l'occasion des 65 de Jean Kellens*, ed. Philippe Swennen (Liège: Presses Universitaires de Liège, 2015), 163–68.

it comes to Persian mystical poetry, the works of the greatest Persian mystical poets, such ʿAṭṭār, Rūmī, as well as Shams al- Dīn Muḥammad Ḥāfiẓ Shīrāzī (d. ca. 792/1390), extensively used the word "Ahriman" and other terminology associated with Zoroastrian demonology.

It appears that several elements helped influence the perception of Iranian Sufis about Iblīs vis-à-vis Angra Mainyu/Ahriman. First, it was the grandeur and the power of the Devil in Zoroastrianism which might have been appealing to Iranian Sufis. Unlike Iblīs in Islam, the Zoroastrian Ahriman was the antithetical equal of God, who not only had the power to challenge God but also had the power of creation. In addition, both Iblīs and Ahriman were caught between the dichotomy of free will and fatalism in the sense that they were both offered the option to follow God's proposal to praise His creation and they both refused and instead chose rebellion against God. While at the same time, whether because of their fixed essence (MP *gohr*) or by the force of Time, they were destined to assume the role of the Devil and undergo the path of predation and infamy.

This infamy has been more pronounced for the character of Ahriman in Zoroastrianism than for Iblīs/Satan in Islam. After all, unlike Zoroastrianism, in Islam, not all matters of evil are attributed to Iblīs/Satan, as man's own ego (*nafs*) plays a key role. Yet in the eyes of the Zoroastrian priesthood, Ahriman, as the epicenter of all malice and wickedness, was also responsible for many undesirable human conditions such as poverty, mendicancy, sickness, physical defect, and hunger. Yet to Sufis who lived among people with all of these conditions, these were virtues to be embraced and promoted; and if all these so-called miseries were caused by Ahriman, then he, as the creator of these "virtues," was going to be the subject of their adoration as well.

For the Sufis, what also made Ahriman a suitable substitute for Iblīs was the fact that he was believed to be non-existent. To Sufis who believed in a sort of monism which was later

theorized as the concept of the Unity of Existence (*waḥdat al-wujūd*), there was no existence outside of God, and the Zoroastrian theory of a non-existent devil as an external entity appealed to them. Finally, it is the juxtaposition of these two notions, namely the holiness of fire in Zoroastrianism and the Qurʾanic idea that Iblīs was created out of fire, that made this fiery and rebellious devil the subject of adulation by the Iranian Sufis. The Zoroastrian idea that Ahriman was made out of infinite darkness—which is never mentioned in the Qurʾan or the commentaries about Iblīs—found its way into Persian Sufi sources such as the *Tamhīdāt* of ʿAyn-al-Qużāt Hamadānī, who claimed Iblīs was made out of infinite black fire.

The influence of Zoroastrian ideas on Iranian Sufism created a synchronistic and intriguing concept of the Devil which was defined by both Islamic and Iranian elements. It is therefore fitting that the names of Ahriman and Iblīs should have been used interchangeably in Persian literature, and that Iranian Sufis should have glorified this formidable yet ancient and rejected deity who came from infinite darkness but simultaneously was made out of the holiest of element— fire.

Chapter 3

The Portrayal of Iblīs in Early Perso-Islamic Sources

By the end of the 10th century, most of the Iranian world had already converted to Islam.[318] The collision of the Persian concept of Ahriman with its Islamic counterpart, Iblīs, created a new hybrid figure who was mighty, celestial, and complex. While most scholars argue that the esoteric dimension of Iblīs was given to him by mystics and Sufis, this chapter aims to demonstrate that alongside Sufi sources, other genres of Perso-Islamic literature such as world histories, the legends of the prophets (*qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*), and works of heresiology and doxography had a complex and often positive view of Iblīs. Some of these sources, such as al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh*, are considered the earliest sources for Persian historiography, and were written before any systematic development of Sufi thought.

The number of such sources that refer to Iblīs are simply too numerous to be studied here, and hence the focus of this chapter will be the most well-known sources of each genre. Almost all of these sources were written either by an Iranian author or in milieus where Persian culture was present and, in many cases, dominant. It is through the fusion of Iranian and Islamic ideas that a positive depiction of Iblīs began to emerge, a picture that is different from orthodox views of either Zoroastrianism or Islam about the Devil.

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[318] *Encyclopædia Iranica*, s.v. "Conversion II. Of Iranians to Islam."

3.1 Iblīs in the Early Perso-Islamic General Histories and Legends of the Prophets

One might find it strange that Iblīs was portrayed as a historical figure in some Perso-Islamic historical texts. The fact that Iblīs found his way into the annals of Perso-Islamic history demonstrates that, to the early medieval authors, as well as the audiences of these texts, Iblīs was perceived as a real historical figure like any other king, caliph, or vizier. In a milieu where the ethnic and religious lore and legends were viewed as a continuous chain of historical events, and where world history almost always began with Creation, the boundary between history and mythology was often blurred.

al-Ṭabarī was, among other things, the first Iranian historian to write extensively about Iblīs. Although written in Arabic, al-Ṭabarī's monumental work of general history, the *Tārīkh al-rusul wa al-mulūk,* commonly known in Persian as *Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*, recounts various versions of the narrative about Iblīs. Before arriving at the story of Iblīs, al-Ṭabarī informs the reader about the Creation itself and relates different narratives about how God created different beings on different days of the week. According to one narrative, God created the angels and the moon and the sun on Friday until only three hours of the day remained. In the last of those three hours, God created Adam, placed him in the Garden, ordered Iblīs to prostrate himself before Adam, and at the end of that hour expelled Adam from the Garden.[319] In all of the narratives, there is no mention of the specific day or time when Iblīs was created, thus adding to his mysterious nature.

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[319] Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad Jarīr al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh al-Ṭabarī: Tārīkh al-rusul wa al-mulūk*, ed. Muḥammad Abū al- Faḍl, Dhakhāʾir al-ʿArab (Cairo: Dār al-Maʿārif bi-Miṣr, 1967), 1:22–23.

The story about Iblīs in al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh* begins right after the account of God's creation of day and night. Iblīs's story takes center stage at this point, as al-Ṭabarī does not discuss the creation of any other celestial beings, such as angels or demons. al-Ṭabarī's narrative demonstrates the significance of Iblīs as a supreme being who merited his own unique and distinct narrative. al-Ṭabarī begins by describing Iblīs's rank and status before his downfall:

> Let us talk about the first one (*awwal*) upon whom God bestowed regal sovereignty (*mulk*) and blessing (*niʿma*) but he rejected the blessing. He denied God's lordship and showed haughtiness and pride toward his Lord. Therefore, God deprived him of His blessing and made him base and humiliated.[320]

According to the Qurʾanic accounts, Iblīs never denied God's lordship and if anything, on many occasions he reaffirmed and submitted himself to God's authority, as demonstrated in Chapter 1 above. Aside from this, what al-Ṭabarī's introduction indicates is that Iblīs was the first being who favored by God and endowed with divine authority. al-Ṭabarī then states that he will also write about the people who adopted Iblīs's tradition (*sunnatahū*) and followed in his footsteps. He calls him their forbearer (*awwaluhum*), their guide (*imāmuhum*), their chief (*raʾīsuhum*), and their founder (*qāʾiduhum*). The author could have used more demeaning terms in describing this "Enemy of God" (*ʿadū Allāh*), the title that became the standard epithet after Iblīs's name. Yet by attributing to Iblīs "tradition" (*sunnah*) (a term usually reserved for the Prophet) and calling him an "imam" who is also a "forbearer," a chief (*raʿīs)* and a founder (*qāʾid*), al-Ṭabarī unintentionally raised Iblīs to a rank on par with that of great prophets, imams, and kings who set traditions, led their followers, and founded dynasties.

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[320] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:79.

After this brief introduction, al-Ṭabarī provides a multitude of different narratives, many of which are congruent with what he relates in his *tafsīr* about the characteristics and attributes of Iblīs before his downfall. These depict Iblīs's illustrious career. It is reported that God had created Iblīs as a beautiful being and ennobled and honored him. According to one narrative, he was the noblest of all the angels and from the most honorable tribe of angels.[321] He was made the king (*malik*) and sultan over the "lowest heaven" (*samāʾ al-dunyā*) and the earth, as well as the gatekeeper of the Garden. According to al-Ṭabarī's various narratives, Iblīs was from a tribe of angels called jinn, which had been created from "blazing fire" (*nār al-samūm*). Before the creation of Adam, the earth was inhabited by jinns; but due to their corruption and bloodshed, God sent an army of angels under the command of Iblīs to vanquish them. According to another narrative, Iblīs was sent by God as a mediator to the jinn who lived on the earth, and he was their judge and acted in that capacity "justly" (*bi-al-ḥaqq*) for a thousand years. Therefore, God chose the name arbitrator (*ḥakam*) for him and divinely revealed this name to him (*auḥiya ilayhu ismuhu*).[322] These great tasks and favors made him haughty, and he came to believe that there was no creature greater than himself.

In his magnum opus, *Murūj al-dhahab wa maʿādin al-jawāhir* (Meadows of Gold and Mines of Gem*s*), the historian and geographer Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn Ḥusayn al-Masʿūdī (d. 346/956), relates that the first inhabitants of the earth were the jinn, and that Iblīs was one of them. They were told by God to not shed the blood of any animal or commit any sin, but when his fellow jinn ignored this command and Iblīs saw their transgression, he asked God to remove him from

[321] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:81.
[322] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:87–88.

them. As a reward, he was taken to the heavens and became the companion of the angels. God then punished all the rebellious jinn and made Iblīs the custodian of the earth.[323]

Abū ʿAlī Muḥammad Balʿamī (d. ca. 387/997), who during the Samanid period translated al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh* for the first time into Persian, and adapted it to a great extent in the process, also reports that Iblīs, whose name in Syriac and Hebrew as he states was ʿAzāzīl, was stationed in the first heaven (*āsmān-i nukhustīn*).[324] He was given sovereignty over the entire earth, where he was the first king and the judge among the angels; and because of this supreme position, he became haughty.[325] All the angels were amazed at how intensely he worshipped God in heaven and on earth. God, however, knew about Iblīs's haughtiness and wanted to show the angels its repercussion, so that they would not become arrogant too. Therefore, God told the angels who were on the earth:

> I am going to create a creature other than you, and make him lord over you, and make him my vicegerent on the earth, and take back the earth from you, and give it, as inheritance, to him and his progeny.[326]

When the angels heard this, they became frightened that they were going to lose the earth.[327] According to Balʿamī, Iblīs attempted to plot a mutiny when he found out that Adam was going to be appointed God's vicegerent on earth. He told the angels who were under his command: "This new creature is not strong. If God gives him the earth, we will not concede it to him, and we

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[323] Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn ibn ʿAlī al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab wa maʿādin al-jawāhir*, ed. Kamāl Ḥasan Marʿī (Beirut: Maktabat al-ʿAṣriyya, 1425/2005), 1:25.

[324] Abū ʿAlī Muḥammad b. Muḥammad Balʿamī, *Tārīkh-i Balʿamī: Takmila va tarjuma-yi Tārīkh-i Ṭabarī*, ed. Muḥammad Taqī Bahār (Malik al-Shuʿarā), rev. ed. Muḥammad Parvīn Gunābādī (Tehran: Zavvār, 1353/1974), *Tārīkh*, 1:67.

[325] Balʿamī, *Tārīkh*, 1:67–68.

[326] Balʿamī, *Tārīkh*, 1: 68.

[327] Balʿamī, *Tārīkh*, 1:68.

will uproot him the way we repelled the jinn who were on the earth before." The angels responded: "What we did to the jinn was by God's command, not yours, and if God gives the earth to him, we will leave it to him." When Iblīs found out that the angels were not going to help him, he concealed his resentment and showed outward obedience toward God and told them: "You are right. The earth belongs to God and he will give it to whomever he wills, and I believe it. I was only testing you."[328] Balʿamī indicates that Iblīs only said this to save face and to conceal his inner resentment toward Adam. However, this is the first time we hear that Iblīs, even under false pretences, was also capable of testing the loyalty and obedience of the angels toward God.

Abū Isḥāq b. Khalaf Nīshābūrī (fl. ca. 5th/11th century), who was the first to write the *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* (Legends of the prophets) in Persian, relates that Iblīs was not a jinn but one of the angels—and the most luminous one among them. There was no place in the seven heavens where he did not worship God, and for three thousand years he was the apprentice of the angel Riżvān, who was the gatekeeper of the Garden.[329] There were seven hundred thousand angels under Iblīs's command, and he worshipped God in the seventh heaven for eight thousand years, until he received "knowledge of primordial time" (*ʿilm-i sābiq*). He then asked for God's permission to go to the sixth heaven and worship Him there. Nīshābūrī indicates that if there was any auspiciousness (*saʿādat*) in Iblīs's fortune, he would have asked to go to a higher heaven and not to a lower one. This, however, is indicative of the fact that Iblīs must have been informed of something when he received "knowledge of primordial time," and that was why he began his descent. This also shows that he was not seeking a higher position and puts into question the assertion that he was arrogant before the creation of Adam. Thereafter, Iblīs constantly asked for

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[328] Balʿamī, *Tārīkh*, 1:72–73.

[329] Abū Isḥāq Ibrāhīm b. Manṣur ibn Khalaf al-Nīshābūrī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, ed. Ḥabīb Yaghmāyī (Tehran: Shirkat-i Intishārāt-i ʿIlmī wa Farhangī, 1382/2003), 5–6.

permission to go to a lower heaven and worship God there. He worshipped God in each heaven for eight thousand years until he finally reached the earth; he then asked God to send him and other angels there, and God agreed.[330]

al-Ṭabarī reports that Iblīs claimed "divine lordship" (*rubūbiyya*) for himself and invited those who were under his command to worship him. Although this is not supported by the Qurʾan or *tafsīr,* nevertheless it depicts Iblīs as someone who could claim divinity and not be punished for it.[331] Could this claim of "divine lordship" be the reason why Iblīs did not prostrate himself before Adam? After all, if Iblīs saw himself as a divine lord worthy of being worshipped, and was not chastised by God for such a bold assumption, then his refusal to bow down before Adam would have been justified. As al-Ṭabarī states, none of the angels except Iblīs claimed to be a "god" (*ilāh*), yet it is not clear at what point during his career Iblīs made such an audacious claim.[332]

Iblīs's career before his expulsion was unblemished. Alluding to the Qurʾan al-Ṭabarī states that after God created all of Creation, "He sat Himself upon the Throne (*ʿarsh*) Q 7:54 " and gave the rulership and management of the lowest heaven and the earth to Iblīs because his knowledge exceeded that of all others and he obeyed God's every command and worshipped Him zealously. [333] In another narrative, al-Ṭabarī states that at first God created some creatures (*khalq*) and told them to prostrate themselves before Adam. They responded: "We shall not do that," so God expressed his wrath in the form of a blazing fire that burned them. He then created a second group and told them: "I am creating a human from clay and you should prostrate yourselves before Adam." They also refused and were destroyed by fire. A third group who were angels were created,

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[330] al-Nīshābūrī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, 6–7.
[331] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:80.
[332] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:80.
[333] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:84–85.

and God commanded them to prostrate themselves, and they all obeyed, except for Iblīs.[334] In another narrative Iblīs was in fact one of the rebellious and corrupt jinn on earth who was taken to heaven by the angels after his tribe was vanquished. The last two narratives raise further questions. In the first instance, why was Iblīs able to escape the fiery fate of the two previous groups of creatures, who like Iblīs, refused to prostrate themselves before Adam? In the second instance, why were all members of Iblīs's tribe annihilated while he was spared and taken to heaven by the angel? This hints at the possibility that that the authors of these texts assumed Iblīs escaped the wrath of God in order to serve his divine purpose.

While most of the stories about Iblīs in the early histories and *qiṣaṣ* genre explain the life of Iblīs before his downfall in a general and often repetitive manner, one text in particular stands apart from the rest: the *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* of Nāṣir al-Dīn b. Burhān al-Dīn Rabghūzī (d. ca. 710/1310). In their introduction to the translation of the work, Hendrik Boeschoten and John O'Kane state that no known Arabic or Persian version of the *Qiṣaṣ* is very close to Rabghūzī's, although Persian sources such as Nīshābūrī's *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyaʾ* may became a source for it sooner than those in Arabic. [335] According to Rabghūzī's *Qiṣaṣ*, at the beginning God created two creatures in Hell. One resembled a lion who was called Tiblīs and the other resembled a she-wolf and was called Jiblīs.[336] The two were married by God's command and after they mated, Jiblīs each time gave birth to twins, one son and one daughter. Jiblīs used to give the daughter to the son who had been born together with her. When a son was born among her seventh brood, she named

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[334] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:87.

[335] Nāṣir al-Dīn b. Burhān al-Dīn al-Rabghūzī, *The Stories of the Prophets: Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ; An Eastern Turkish Version*, ed and trans. Hendrik Boeschoten and John O'Kane, 2nd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1: xix.

[336] al-Rabghūzī, *Stories of the Prophets*, 2:10–11. While Boeschoten and O'Kane transliterate the name of the two Hellish creatures who became the parents of Iblīs as Jibīt and Tiblīt, I assert that the correct form of names are Jiblīs and Tiblīs which also rhyme with the name Iblīs. This assertion is based on the Tashkent lithograph and the Majlis MS of Rabghūzī's *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*. See Rabghūzī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, lithog. ed., 14; Rabghūzī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, MS, Majlis, 209280, fol. 10r.

him Ḥāriṯ who was cunning and intelligent.[337] Ḥāriṯ was not happy about this and did not accept a different girl. Instead, he sat down in a corner of Hell and occupied himself with worshipping God. After he had worshipped for many years, God elevated him from Hell to the fifth level of the earth. As he showed more piety God elevated him further until he was brough to the surface of the earth where he worshipped so much that from east to west there was no place left where he had not prostrated himself. He was raised then by God through the heavenly spheres all the way to Paradise where God made him the chief of Paradise and master of all angels and his name was changed to ʿAzāzīl. By then he had lived for three thousand years.[338] Based on this account one can assume that as ʿAzāzīl proved his worth, God, in a way became his adopted guardian.

Rabghūzī also states that when ʿAzāzīl was in charge of Paradise he taught knowledge to all the angels. One day he read on the Preserved Tablet (*lauḥ-i maḥfūẓ*) that one angel was going to become cursed. Upon learning this, the angels became afraid and went to ʿAzāzīl and begged him that because he was their master, he should pray to God, that He may protect them from the curse. ʿAzāzīl prayed and the angels said amen. Thanks to ʿAzāzīl's prayer, God protected all the other angels from the curse, but ʿAzāzīl himself succumbed to it.[339] It appears that the bond between God and ʿAzāzīl was so strong that even angels would ask him to intercede on their behalf.

The narratives about the manner in which Adam was created also vary. Most relate that God sent various angels to collect the soil from the earth from which He was going to make Adam's physical form, but the anthropomorphized earth did not want Adam to be created from its soil, so it begged all angels including Gabriel and Michael, who had come to collect its soil, to have mercy and not to do so and therefore all the angels sympathised with the earth and did not collect the soil.

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[337] Rabghūzī, *Stories of the Prophets*, 2:11.
[338] Rabghūzī, *Stories of the Prophets*, 2:11.
[339] Rabghūzī, *Stories of the Prophets*, 2:20.

Only the Angel of Death (ʿAzrāʾīl) was determined to obey God's command and brought Him the soil because he was known to be ruthless and put obedience toward God's command above all else. However, on the authority of Ibn ʿAbbās, al-Ṭabarī relates that God commanded Iblīs to go and collect the skin (*adīm*) of the earth and bring sweet and salty clay from it, and after he had done so, God created Adam from it.[340] That is why Iblīs protested to God saying, "Shall I prostrate myself before the one whom You have created from clay?"; because as al-Ṭabarī indicates, at least according to one narrative, Adam was made from exactly the same clay that Iblīs had brought to God.[341] In this case, Iblīs's protestation would be understandable because how could he prostrate himself before the one who was made out of the same clay which he had delivered to God?

When Adam's physical form was finally created and before God breathed His pneuma into this clay form, his body was left to mature for a period of forty days or forty years, depending on the version of the narrative. al-Ṭabarī relates that God made Adam with his own hands as He knew that if Iblīs was going to become haughty toward it, He could say "Did you become haughty toward something that I worked on with My own hands and which I Myself was not haughty toward?" While the first part of this exchange is mentioned in Q 38:75, in which God chastises Iblīs for being arrogant toward something which He had made with His own hands, there is no indication in the Qurʾan of the expression "which I Myself was not haughty toward." This was hence an extra-Qurʾanic saying suggesting that, on this particular matter, Iblīs believed himself to be even above God. The fact of the matter is that on that fateful day, only two individuals, namely God and Iblīs, did not prostrate themselves before Adam, and it seems that al-Ṭabarī tried to insist that

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[340] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:90.
[341] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:90–91.

Iblīs's downfall was caused by his making the mistake of putting himself on a par with or even above God.

As al-Ṭabarī relates, all the angels were frightened of Adam's body, but none more so than Iblīs. He would often come and kick it with his foot and when he did, it sounded like a hollow clay pot. He then entered Adam's body through the nose and exited through the anus and said: "You were not created to make any sound. There is a purpose to your creation. If I am given dominion over you, I will destroy you; and if you are given dominion over me, I will rebel against you." Iblīs then told the angels, "Do not be afraid of this one. Your God is solid within and this one is hollow."[342] This passage indicates that Iblīs's supposed rebellion was against Adam, not God, as he even sided with his "solid God" against this "hollow Adam".

After Iblīs's refusal to bow down before Adam, his kingship of the lowest heaven and earth as well as his post as the trustee of the Garden were taken away from him and he was banished. But as al-Ṭabarī reports, he remained in heaven and did not descend to earth.[343] al-Ṭabarī, like most Muslim exegetes, believes that after his act of disobedience, Iblīs was turned into Shayṭān and became the enemy of God. Neither of these claims is supported by the Qurʾan. In fact, in several places in the Qurʾan, both Iblīs and Shayṭān chastise sinners for disobeying God. In one story Rabghūzī relates that on the Day of Judgement God will send all those to Hell who are predestined to go there and as Q 41:29 states they will ask God: "Show us the jinn and the men who led us astray. We will trample them under our feet and bring them low." Then God will say: "O Iblīs, those predestined for Hell are asking for you." Iblīs will say: "I want them too." God then will erect a pulpit of fire in Hell and Iblīs will mount that pulpit and say: "I reject your association

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[342] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:92–93.
[343] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:103.

of me [with God] before." (Q 14:22) Those predestined for Hell will be unable to answer this.[344] This is another example that medieval Islamic authors viewed God and Iblīs's relationship as being one of reciprocity. Just as Iblīs was the master of the angels before his downfall, after the day of Judgment he will become the high preacher of Hell with his own pulpit which God will erect for him and reprimand the sinner about their wayward ways.

In his *Murūj al-dhahab*, al-Masʿūdī also describes Iblīs's career before his downfall as illustrious. After he refused to prostrate himself before Adam, he told God: "I am better than him… I was the vicegerent on earth; my garb was made out of feathers; I was adorned by [divine] light, crowned with blessings (*al-muttawij bi-al-kirāma*), and I have worshipped you in the heavens and earth."[345] Without denying any of these assertions, God told him to get out.

After Adam and Eve were seduced by the Devil and expelled from the Garden, they descended to earth along with Iblīs. Iblīs fell in the land of Mesene (*Mīsān*), which was also called Characene in antiquity, located at the head of the Persian Gulf. Other narratives mention that Iblīs was cast down to earth and landed on the bank of al-Ubullah on the Tigris River close to the city of Basra.[346] According to Balʿamī, after Iblīs was cursed, he supplicated to God in a litany (*munājāt*), saying:

> "O Lord, there is no one who served You and was not rewarded. For thousands of years I served You so immensely in heaven and on earth that no other angel was able to do what I have done. Yet You cursed me and took the kingdom of the earth out of my hands and gave it to my enemy. Do you not reward me for my service?" God said:

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[344] Rabghūzī, *Stories of the Prophets*, 2:37.
[345] al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, 1:25.
[346] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:122.

> "What reward do you want O accursed one?" Iblīs said: "Give me time until all humans are dead and no one except me is alive when the trumpet is blown." God said: "I will give that to you."[347]

Iblīs then tells God that he will use the time given to him to lead all humans astray. The word *munājāt*, which denotes the most intimate form of prayer, is often used for the saints, Sufis, or those who seek nearness to God. By addressing God in *munājāt* and calling Him "Lord," Balʿamī demonstrates that even after his fall, Iblīs saw God as his only confidant to whom he could lament about his ordeal and ask for recompense for his past services. This type of dialogue between God and Iblīs is a literary trope in classical Persian literature in which the heartbroken lover addresses the cruel but distant beloved and, despite bemoaning the beloved's cruelty, still seeks intimacy and reward with him/her.

Another rendition of this account is mentioned in Nīshābūrī's *Qiṣaṣ*, in which God seems to be debating Iblīs about how he plans to mislead humans. In this narrative, after Iblīs reminds God that he should be compensated for his past services, God allows Iblīs to live on until the day of Resurrection. Then a debate takes place between the two in which Iblīs tries to convince God that humans will surely be deceived by him, while God tries to convince him that only the weak will be led astray. God assures Iblīs that even the fallen ones will have a chance to repent, and Iblīs says that he will prevent that from happening. God responds: "O Iblīs! If you stop them from repenting, then how do you propose to stop me from being merciful and forgiving?"[348] Upon hearing this, Iblīs became downhearted (*diltang*) and said: "O Lord! Men will claim to love You, but they will disobey You; and they will claim animosity toward me, but they will follow me.

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[347] Balʿamī, *Tārīkh*, 1:94–95.
[348] al-Nīshābūrī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 14.

Where is the wisdom in forgiving them?" God responds: "[The wisdom is] in the fact that they claim to love Me and because of that I will forgive them and have mercy on them because they have animosity toward you." Iblīs then said, "O God! If I fail in everything I will [promise] to do two things to them: adorn the world in their eyes and mislead them by making them love the world," and God replied: "If you will do as you said, I will [promise] to do two things: I will forgive them all and bring them to Paradise."[349]

In this dialogue, God does not demand that Iblīs abandon his plan to beguile men, nor does He threaten to annihilate Iblīs after learning about his sinister plan. Instead, He proposes to counteract all of Iblīs's plots, as if He anticipated and welcomed the challenge. Iblīs also reminds God that humans are not worthy of His mercy, but God dismisses this claim, despite fully knowing that Iblīs is correct. It is not difficult to conclude that based on this debate, God "needed" Iblīs in order to manifest His mercy and forgiveness, for without the Devil there would not be any sinners who would repent and ask God for absolution. Therefore, Iblīs may be viewed as an indispensable divine agent without whom God's mercy would be meaningless.

Among the multiple and often repetitive *qiṣaṣ* narratives about the story of the Devil's misleading Adam and Eve in the Garden, the version related by Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad al-Thaʿlabī (d. 426/1035) in his *ʿArāʾis al-majālis fī qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* is the most fascinating one. al-Thaʿlabī reports that when Adam and Eve were placed in the Garden from which Iblīs was barred, Iblīs said to himself: "Woe to me! I have been worshipping God for many thousands and thousands of years and He still does not let me enter the Garden, whereas this creature which

[349] al-Nīshābūrī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, 14–15.

Almighty God has just created is allowed into the Garden."[350] Iblīs desired to have Adam expelled from the Garden. Therefore, he stood at the front gate of the Garden and prayed there for three hundred years until he became well-known for his worship by the inhabitants of the Garden. During this time, he was waiting for someone to come out of the Garden, but God permitted no one to do so until the peacock, who was the master of the birds in the Garden, came out. Iblīs started to flatter the peacock about his beauty and then began to weep. The peacock asked him who he was and why was he crying. Iblīs replied: "I am one of the cherubim angels (*al-malāʾikat al-karrūbīn*), and I weep in sorrow because you will lose your beauty and the perfection of your creation."[351] The peacock was surprised, and Iblīs told him that all creatures will eventually perish, unless they eat of the fruits of the Tree of Immortality. The peacock asked where the tree was, and Iblīs told him that it was in the middle of the Garden and that he could show it to him if he would take him inside. The peacock told Iblīs that it was impossible to do so because the Garden's gatekeeper, Riḍwān, did not let anyone enter or leave except with his permission.[352] He then told Iblīs that he would bring the snake to him, because if anyone was capable of secretly bringing anyone into the Garden it was her, because she was the servant of Adam, God's vicegerent in the Garden. Then the peacock went back and spoke to the snake about the cherubim angel who knew about the Tree of Immortality. The snake agreed and went to Iblīs, who asked her to take him into the Garden. The snake reminded Iblīs that as long as Riḍwān was guarding the gates, they could

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[350] Abū Isḥāq Aḥmad b. Muḥammad b. Ibrāhim al-Nīshābūrī al-Thaʿlabī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ al-musammā ʿArāʾis al-majālis* (Cairo: Sharikat Maktabat wa Maṭbaʿat Muṣṭafā al-Babī al-Ḥalabī, 1374/1954), 30. All references to the *ʿArāʾis al-majālis* are to the Arabic edition.

[351] al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 30.

[352] al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 31.

not get into the Garden. Iblīs suggested that he could turn into wind and the serpent could carry him between its fangs. The snake agreed and, in this way, Iblīs was able to enter into the Garden.[353]

The noteworthy point in this tale is that Iblīs introduced himself as one of the cherubim angels without raising the suspicion of two noble creatures of the Garden. This means that Iblīs, contrary to most accounts, did not lose his angelic form, nor did he transform into a satanic demon. This point would appear to be corroborated by the fact that he prayed for three hundred years in order to gain access to the Garden, an act that could not have been performed by a demonic being and be noticed by all the creatures of the Garden. al-Thaʿlabī does not explain the connection between this long prayer and the deceiving of the peacock and snake by Iblīs. If the Devil's story about the Tree of Immortality was sufficient to get him into the Garden, then why would he depict himself as a pious figure and pretend to worship God? Is it possible that after three hundred years of worshipping, his prayers were finally answered, and he found a way into the Garden? As usual, the biggest absentee in this story is God, who by his omniscience was supposedly observing all of this but remained silent and did nothing to prevent it. Once more, this story appears like a well-rehearsed stage play which shows the possible collusion between God and Iblīs.

As al-Thaʿlabī relates when Iblīs entered the Garden, he stood in front of Adam and Eve, but they did not recognize him. He then lamented and wept for them in a way that it saddened them. They asked Iblīs why he was weeping, and he told them: "I am weeping for you. You will die and be separated from this honor and blessing which you are in now. This weighted heavy on them and they lamented. Iblīs also wept and walked away.[354] He appeared to them once again and it was then when he deceived them to eat from the Forbidden Tree. What is striking here is that

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[353] al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 31.
[354] al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 31.

Iblīs's weeping for of Adam and Eve and the forewarning he gave them about their fate which eventually came to pass. In Iblīs's weeping and walking away, one can detect a sense of sympathy for the weight of the duty, which was delegated to him, namely to deceive Adam and Eve and also for the eventual downfall of all three of them which Iblīs foresaw. al-Thaʿlabī explains that the banishment of Adam from the Garden was decreed by God even before were deceived by Satan and ate from the Forbidden Tree because when God was creating Adam he said: "Indeed, I will appoint upon the earth a vicegerent" (Q 2:30) and therefore Adam was never meant to be a permanent resident of the Garden.[355]

In the end, after Iblīs succeeded in deceiving Adam and Eve, all five, namely Iblīs, the snake, the peacock, Adam, and Eve, were banished from the Garden to earth and each was castigated with ten punishments. Yet the description of some of Iblīs's punishments seems more like a new endorsement rather than a chastisement. According to al-Thaʿlabī, the ten punishments were:

> The first was his dismissal from rulership, for he was the king of the earth and the lowest heaven and the treasurer of the Garden. The second was being banished from God's presence to the earth. The third was that God transformed his form, turning him into Satan after being an angel. The fourth, God changed his name, for it had been ʿAzāzīl and He named him Iblīs because he despaired (*ablasa*) of God's mercy. The fifth, God appointed him leader of the wretched ones (*jaʿalahu imām al-ashqiyāʾ*). The sixth, God cursed him. The seventh God took away his knowledge. The eighth, God sealed the door of repentance to him. The ninth, God made him a rebel, devoid of

[355] al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 32.

> goodness and mercy. The tenth, God appointed him the preacher (*khaṭīb*) of the people of the Fire.[356]

Exoterically, these punishments might seem damning; but to esotericists they all carry a hidden meaning. As discussed in the Chapter 1, if we accept the hypothesis that God and Iblīs colluded from the beginning, then in order to assume his new role as the "villain" par excellence, it behooved Iblīs to relinquish all his previous glory and assume a new appearance, as well as a new title. Unlike all the other angels, Iblīs is the only divine being besides God who has multiple names, and this demonstrates the complexity and versatility of his character. The fourth punishment mentioned by al-Thaʿlabī in regard to Iblīs's name change from ʿAzāzīl to Iblīs is questionable, because in the Qurʾan, when all the angels prostrated themselves before Adam, God indicated that Iblīs and not ʿAzāzīl was the one who refused, and therefore the name change could not have taken place as the result of his disobedience. This suggests that just as Iblīs was capable of assuming different forms and faces, depending on the situation, he could also assume different names; to some he is the angelic ʿAzāzīl or the ambiguous Iblīs, and to others he is a tormenting and antagonizing Satan.

What is also remarkable are the job titles that were given to Iblīs by God. The verb repeatedly used by al-Thaʿlabī here is *jaʿala*, which means 'to assign' or 'to appoint,' and this refers to the fact that Iblīs, in his new capacity, acted as an appointee of God over sinners. He was appointed as an *imam* to the wayward and as a *khaṭīb* to the people of Hell. These titles have a positive connotation in Islamic terminology, and by assigning them to Iblīs, the author alluded to Iblīs's role as the necessary counterpart to the *imam*s and *khaṭībs* for the righteous. al-Thaʿlabī

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[356] al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 34.

pointed out that even in appearance, Iblīs looked like an *imam*. He mentions that when Iblīs was sent down to earth, he was wearing a turban that did not descend below his chin.[357] The depiction of Iblīs as an appointed *s* to the unrighteous and a preacher to the damned demonstrates that his mission was sanctioned by God.

Another point which indicates that Iblīs was sent down with a sanctioned mission is mentioned in the following conversation in which Iblīs said to God:

> "O Lord, You banished me from the Garden because of Adam, but I cannot overcome him except through the dominion that You provide." God said: "You are indeed given dominion over him." He replied: "Lord, give me more." God said: "For every single child born to him, two will be born to you." Iblīs said: "Lord, give me more." God said: "Their breast will be your residence, and you will make blood flow from them." Iblīs said: "Lord, give me more." God said: "'…Assault them with your horses and foot soldiers and become a partner in their wealth and their children and promise them.' But Satan does not promise them except delusion [Q17:64]."[358]

This appears to be undisputable evidence that God gave Iblīs all that he desired in order for him to have dominion over Adam and his progeny. By stating that he was banished because of Adam and that he had no power of his own to overcome him, Iblīs hinted at two important points, namely that he was banished solely for the reason to dominate humans and that he was not a free agent because his power to dominate humans was bestowed upon him by God.

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[357] al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis* al-*majālis*, 41.
[358] al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis* al-*majālis*, 41.

Iblīs continued to have contacts with Adam and Eve after they were banished to the earth. According to Balʿamī, in the land of India, Iblīs approached Adam and told him: "Because of you God made me hopeless toward His mercy and took dominion away from me and gave it to you; from now on I will become your friend and serve you." Adam accepted Iblīs's suggestion and hence Iblīs became Adam's first friend on earth. [359]

al-Ṭabarī reports that Iblīs, who was called Ḥārith among other names, came to Eve during her first pregnancy and asked her: "What do you have in your belly?" Eve responded: "I don't know." Iblīs asked her: "From where does he come out? From your nose, eyes, or mouth?" Eve responded again: "I don't know." Iblīs asked: "Would you obey me if he is born healthy and you are not harmed?" Eve responded: "Yes." Iblīs then told her to name the child ʿAbd al-Ḥārith ("Slave of Ḥārith"). She told Adam about this and Adam warned her about the cunning of the same Devil who had caused them to be banished from the Garden. Iblīs appeared once more and made the same request, and this time she accepted; and when the baby was born healthy, she named him ʿAbd al-Ḥārith.[360]

A second version of this story has it that when Eve gave birth to a boy, Iblīs came to Adam and Eve and told them: "Name him my slave or else I will kill him." Adam responded: "I obeyed you once and you kicked me out of the Garden," and he refused to do so, and they named him ʿAbd al-Raḥmān ("Slave of the Merciful One" [i.e., God]). Iblīs overcame the boy and killed him. Eve became pregnant again and Iblīs made the same request and threat. Adam refused and named the second boy Ṣāliḥ, which means "righteous," and Iblīs overcame the second boy and killed him

[359] Balʿamī, *Tārīkh*, 1:98.
[360] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:149.

as well. When Eve became pregnant for the third time, Iblīs came to them and said: "If you want to overcome me, name the boy ʿAbd al-Ḥārith," and they accepted.[361]

Yet a third, slightly different, version of this story relates that Adam and Eve had two children, whom they named ʿAbd Allāh ("Slave of Allah") and ʿUbayd Allāh ("Little Slave of Allah"), and taught them to worship God, but they all died. Then Iblīs came to Adam and Eve and suggested that if they gave their third child a different name, he would survive. Thereafter, they called him ʿAbd al- Ḥārith. While none of the versions of this story explicitly says so, it appears that after naming the boy ʿAbd al-Ḥārith, the boy was able to live. Otherwise, the author would have definitely mentioned it as yet another empty promise of the Devil which Adam and Eve fell for once more.

Balʿamī also relates a slightly different version of this story in his *Tārīkh*. According to him, when the first three children of Adam and Eve all died after only one year, Eve became pregnant for the fourth time. Iblīs came to them and expressed his sorrow for their losses and told Adam: "I see it within my heart, and I make a divination (*fāl*) that this child will be healthy and beautiful… If he is as I predict, would you gift him to me and name him as my slave?" Adam agreed and after the child was born and was both healthy and beautiful, Iblīs told Adam: "Do you see my divination was true and a boy was born exactly like I said? You too must be true to your word. Name him my slave so that we both may benefit from him."[362] Adam agreed and named the child ʿAbd al-Ḥāriṣ. In another version of this tale told by Nīshābūrī, Iblīs appeared as a physician and a jinn to Eve and introduced himself as al-Ḥāriṣ, and the child that was named after Iblīs grew up to be Cain.[363]

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[361] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:150.
[362] Balʿamī, *Tārīkh*, 1:98–99.
[363] al-Nīshābūrī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, 24.

Two issues stand out in the overall story: one is the fact that in none of the versions does God play any role; rather, Iblīs has a free hand to make promises or utter and carry out threats like a god. Adam and Eve are neither warned about accepting Iblīs's suggestion, nor chastised for succumbing to his promises or threats. It is also not helpful that God does not appear to be on their side in any of the instances, particularly when their children who were named after Him kept dying or were killed by Iblīs. The second issue is that almost nowhere in these narratives does Iblīs appear to be cunning or beguiling. He was simply making offers or uttering threats, and, in all cases, it seems that he was successful in fulfilling his promises. Perhaps this assertion may be regarded as "heretical" but whereas God was indifferent toward any of the events concerning Adam and Eve's children, Iblīs at least offered help or solutions to their conundrum. Iblīs's choice of the name is also interesting. The authors could have picked more familiar and obvious names for the child, such as "ʿAbd al-Iblīs" or "ʿAbd al-Shayṭān," or even "ʿAbd al-ʿAzāzīl." "al-Ḥāriṯ" means "the lion," but the more prevalent translation is "the farmer who prepares the soil for planting," and this is quite a fitting epithet for Iblīs. If Adam and his progeny were made of mud, then the task of preparing that mud for any kind of seed that God plans to plant in it falls on Iblīs. To choose one of his lesser-known names used during his angelic life suggests that perhaps some of the authors still viewed Iblīs as a divine agent who in his own devilish way was still in the service of God. All the versions of this story depict a very powerful figure who was given a free hand to make offers or threats and deliver on both without fear of repercussion.

Iblīs's interaction with Adam was not solely based on deception and testing the latter's faith. For instance, when Adam was sent down to earth, he was given, among other things, the seeds of the grapevine, which he planted. al-Thaʿlabī reports that when the grapes were fully grown, Iblīs came along and stole the fruit. Adam said to him: "Woe to you! You banished me from the Garden,

and now you do not want to leave me sustenance." Iblīs told him: "In it, there is a share for me." Adam asked: "What is your share?" Iblīs said: "It is the euphoric and intoxicating effect of it; the rest of it is yours."[364] Hence, the intoxicating effect of wine fell under the dominion of Iblīs.

Iblīs was also provided many other tools to ensnare mankind. As al-Thaʿlabī explains, when Iblīs was banished, he told God:

> "O Lord, You have cursed me and expelled me from the Garden, and appointed me as an accursed Satan, detested and loathed; and all the while you have sent messengers to the progeny of Adam and send down to them the books [of the prophets]. Who are my messengers?" God replied: "Soothsayers." Iblīs said: "And what are my books?" "Tattoo markings." Iblīs said: "And what is my Prophetic narrative (*hadith*)?" God replied: "Your *hadith* is the lie." Iblīs said: "And what is my scriptural recitation (*qirāʾat*)?" God replied: "Poetry." Iblīs said: "And who is my caller to prayer (*muʾadhdhin*)?" God replied: "Your *muʾadhdhin* is the reed flute." Iblīs said: "And where is my mosque?" God replied: "Your mosque is the marketplace." Iblīs said: "And where is my dwelling?" God replied: "Your dwelling is the bathhouse." Iblīs said: "And what is my food?" God replied: "Your food is anything over which My name is not mentioned." Iblīs said: "What is my drink?" God replied: "Every intoxicant." Iblīs said: "What are my snares?" God replied: "Your snares are women."[365]

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[364] al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 39.
[365] al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 41.

This particular story goes beyond the simple confirmation of Iblīs's mission by God, as God is providing Iblīs with his own arsenal to assault humans. Furthermore, by enumerating many of these elements which have religious significance in Islam, namely, the messenger, the book, the *hadith*, the *qirāʾat* which is used for recitation of the Qurʾan, the mosque, and the *muʾadhdhin*, God not only tacitly supports the creation of the "church of Iblīs," a counter-religion to the true faith, but he informs its "deity," i.e., Iblīs, about the building blocks of this new "faith." In this alternate "faith," it is not God who is supplicated to, called upon, and worshipped, but Iblīs. This just shows that in the psyche of the Perso-Islamic authors, Iblīs must have been so valued by God, that they had no trouble imagining God dedicating a "religion" to him, with its own rules and regulations. Needless to say, had a great prophet like Moses or Muḥammad, or an archangel like Gabriel, asked for a privilege such as having a "holy book" and a "house of worship" dedicated to him, he would assuredly have been smitten by God.

But what about Persian Sufis and mystics? How did this story fit into their worldview? By the beginning of the 5th/11th century, Persian mystics began to refer to many of the abovementioned elements, which were often frowned upon or forbidden by Muslim jurists and theologians, as rhetorical devices in their writings. In fact, many Muslim theologians viewed poetry, musical instruments, and alcoholic drinks as the instruments of Iblīs. Yet wine and wine-related terms such as *sharāb* and *may* ("wine"), *mastī* ("drunkenness"), *piyāla* and *jām* ("wine cup"), and *sāqī* ("cup-bearer"), as well as activities such playing and listening to musical instruments (*ghināʾ, ṭarab, samāʿ*), and the physical beauty of the female or male beloved, were all used as symbols by the Iranian Sufis to convey their mystical and esoteric ideas. For Persian mystics, poetry became one of the most important mediums through which they disseminated their lofty ideals about the Sufi path and divine love. Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, the most celebrated Persian

mystical poet, began his poetic magnum opus, the *Maṯnavī-yi maʿnavī,* with the plight of the reed flute (*nay*) who had been separated from the reedbed. It is also related that some Sufis, including Rūmī, on occasion conducted their spiritual retreats in bathhouses.[366] Knowledge of this tale and the association of Iblīs with wine, poetry, and musical instruments were ubiquitous among the medieval Muslim intelligentsia, and yet Sufis adopted all of these forbidden elements either in the writings, or more significantly, in their day-to-day activities. Iblīs therefore became the symbol of this kind of heterodoxy which embraced forbidden elements and incorporated them into the Sufi lexicon. In the extreme cases of the Malāmatiyya or Qalandariyya, which were antinomian movements, some Sufis on the fringes of society even adopted Iblīs as a source of emulation.

In other instances, Iblīs evoked the readers' sympathy and compassion. According to al-Thaʿlabī, after their fall, Adam once saw Iblīs in a vast, arid desert and began to chastise him, saying:

> "O accursed one! What is this that you have done to me? You misled me and caused my expulsion from the Garden and did what you did to me." Iblīs wept and said: "O Adam, indeed I acted towards you as you say, and brought you down to this state. But who did this to me and brought me to this state, and caused me to descend to this rank?"[367]

While Iblīs might deserve our sympathy in this case, he reminds the reader that God, as the grand schemer, is the ultimate cause of all evil and that he was only an actor who performed his role well when it was required of him.

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[366] Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Balkhī Rūmī, *Fīhi mā fīhi*, ed. Badīʿ al-Zamān Furūzānfar (rep., Tehran: Nāmak, 1378 /1999), 166; Aflākī al-ʿĀrifī, Shams al-Dīn Aḥmad. *Manāqib al-ʿārifīn*, ed. Taḥsīn Yāzījī (Tehran: Dunyā-yi Kitāb, 1375/1996), 1:229, 293, 344.

[367] al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 42.

As al-Ṭabarī and al-Thaʿlabī and Rabghūzī report, Iblīs was also involved with the children of Adam. Not surprisingly, the Devil is also present in the story of Cain's murder of his brother Abel. al-Thaʿlabī and Rabghūzī relate that Cain did not know how to kill his brother. Therefore, Iblīs appeared to him and took a bird, put its head on a stone, and then smashed it with another stone.[368] According to another narrative, when Cain killed Abel because God had accepted Abel's offering and not his, he ran away from his father to Yemen, where he met Iblīs who told him: "Abel's offering was accepted and consumed by fire because he was the servant and worshipper of fire. You too should make a fire which is for you and your descendants." Hence, Cain was the first person to build a fire temple, set up fire, and worship it.[369] This tale suggests that in the author's view, all Zoroastrians are potentially descendants of Cain. More importantly, it appears that because Iblīs was made from fire, to worship fire could potentially translate into worshipping Iblīs himself. Iblīs is also reported to have appeared to the first tribes of men in the form of a beautiful youth, served them, and then introduced them to music, as well as created women's makeup for the first time.[370] al-Ṭabarī viewed this as the introduction of corrupt moral behavior to the progeny of Adam, but nevertheless, once more Iblīs appears to have been in the service of humans.

In Perso-Islamic general world histories such as al-Ṭabarī's *Tārīkh*, the further the reader gets from the story of Creation, the fewer the stories about Iblīs become. However, this does not mean that Iblīs completely disappeared from the scene. On the contrary, Iblīs, or Shayṭān, is present at almost every major event in the lives in almost all the prophets. For instance, al-Ṭabarī narrates that when Noah was gathering animals on his ark, the first to be put aboard was the ant,

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[368] al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 45; al-Rabghūzī, *Stories of the Prophets*, 2:34.
[369] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:165; al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 47.
[370] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:167.

and the last was the donkey. When Noah brought the donkey in and its front half was inside, Iblīs grabbed its tail, and the donkey could not move. Noah told the donkey: "Woe to you. Get inside!" The donkey tried but was unable to move. Eventually, Noah said: "Woe to you! Get inside even if Satan is with you!" Although as al-Ṭabarī explains this as a slip of the tongue, when Noah said this, Iblīs let the donkey go inside and went in with it. When Noah saw Iblīs inside, he said to him: "How did you get in here?" Iblīs replied: "Did you not say: 'Get inside, even if Satan is with you?'" Noah said: "Get out and leave me." Iblīs said: "You have no choice but to carry me," hence Iblīs was placed on the back (*ẓahr*) of the ark.[371] To what exactly this anecdote alludes within the story of the Flood is uncertain, but it is clear that if Iblīs was one of the sinners who drowned in the Flood, then he should not have been in the ark and saved from the Flood, because as all the versions of the story have it, only believers were allowed into the ark.

Noah had a positive encounter with Iblīs as well. According to Shia hadith narrator and scholar Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Fattāl al-Nīshābūrī (d. 508/ 1114) in his book *Rauḍat al-wāʿiẓīn wa tabṣirat al-muttaʿiẓīn* also narrates a tale from Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq who related that that, Iblīs went to Noah after the Flood was over and told him:

> I am indebted you more than anyone because you cursed these sinners [who were drowned] and set me free from [continuing to tempt] them. Therefore, as a token of my appreciation, I will warn you about two traits. First, beware of jealousy and what it had done to me, and second, beware of avarice and what it had done to Adam.[372]

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[371] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:184.

[372] Abū ʿAlī Muḥammad ibn Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī al-Fattāl al-Nīsābūrī, *Rauḍat al-wāʿiẓīn wa tabṣirat al-muttaʿiẓīn*, ed. Ghulāmḥusayn Majīdī and Mujtabā Farajī (Qum: Dalīl-i Mā, 1381/2010), 2:365.

This story is also recounted by the Persian Sufi Abū al-Ḥasan Kharaqānī. In Kharaqānī's version, Iblīs approaches Noah and tells him: "Ask me about anything you want."[373] Noah refuses but God instructs him: "Hear what he has to say as he cannot beguile you."[374] The rest of the story is similar to al-Fattāl al-Nīshābūrī's version. This demonstrates the ability of Iblīs to even instruct and guide God's prophets.

Iblīs also appeared to Abraham when Abraham was preparing to sacrifice his son Ishmael or Isaac (depending on the tradition) as God had commanded him to do in a dream. Iblīs separately asked Abraham, his wife, and the sacrificial son what they were going to do and whether they were sure that this was truly God's command. When each of them answered that it was God's command, Iblīs left them. At one point, to test Abraham's resolve, Iblīs even told him that it was Satan and not God who had appeared in his dream and commanded him to sacrifice his son. Only after Iblīs became certain that Abraham was resolute in his mission did he leave him alone.[375]

Among the prophets, Job had the most trying encounter with Iblīs. Before delving into Job's trial, al-Ṭabarī informs us that while Job's wife was unaware of her lineage, Iblīs appeared and reminded her that she was Liyā, daughter of Jacob, as he addressed her as: "O Liyā, You are the daughter of the truthful one (*ṣiddīq*) and the sister of the truthful one."[376] Why would Iblīs confirm someone's true lineage by calling her the daughter and sister of the "truthful one"? In al-Ṭabarī's report, there is no indication that Iblīs was saying this out of deceitfulness or mockery. Therefore, in this instance, Iblīs functioned like an angelic being who recognized and confirmed someone's noble lineage.

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[373] Shafʿī Kadkanī, *Nivishta bar daryā*, 361.
[374] Shafʿī Kadkanī, *Nivishta bar daryā*, 361.
[375] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:274.
[376] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:322.

Among all the stories of the prophets, the one about Job's interaction with Iblīs is the most puzzling. The story is found in the Old Testament in the Book of Job. It relates that Job was a righteous man who honored and served God and avoided evil. He was blessed with immense wealth and ten children and lived a prosperous and happy life while obeying God's commands. As the Book of Job recounts:

> Now there was a day when the sons of God [i.e., angels or cherubim] came to present themselves before Lord, and Satan also came among them. God asked Satan, "From where have you come?" Satan answered God and said: "From going back and forth on the earth, and from walking up and down on it." God said to Satan: "Have you considered My servant Job, that there is none like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man, one that fears God, and turning away from evil." Then Satan answered God and said: "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have You not put a hedge about him and his house and all that he has, on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out Your hand and touch all that he has, and he will blasphemy You to Your face." And God said to Satan: "Behold, all that he has is in your power. Only do not put forth your hand on him."[377]

Satan then went away from God's presence, and by causing a series of catastrophes, he destroyed all of Job's wealth and killed all his children. But Job praised God and did not blame God for his calamities. There was another gathering of the angels in the presence of God, and Satan came among them. God asked Satan:

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[377] Job 1:5–11(New American Standard Version)

> Have you considered my servant Job? For there is no one like him on the earth, a blameless and upright man fearing God and turning away from evil. And he still holds fast his integrity, although you incited Me against him to destroy him without cause." Satan responded, "Skin for skin! Yes, all that a man has he will give for his life. However, put forth Your hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh; he will blaspheme You to Your face." So, God said to Satan: "Behold, he is in your power, only spare his life." Then Satan went out from the presence of the God and smote Job with sore boils from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head.[378]

Finally, in despair, Job cursed his own life and asked God about the reason for these afflictions. God claimed that He knew what Job did not and that he was not to question God's infinite wisdom. In the end, He restored to Job all that he had lost.

Various renditions of this story can be found across different genres of Islamic literature. In regard to the presence of the Devil among the angels at the beginning of the tale, al-Thaʿlabī's rendition comes closest to the Biblical account:

> Gabriel is the closest to God and his respected rank in the presence of God is such that no other angel can attain it. Gabriel is the one who receives the word of God; when God speaks well about a human, Gabriel hears it first, then Michael, then the Cherubim among the angels who are positioned near him and surround the Throne. When this becomes known among those esteemed angels, that a word of blessing and salutation for that man was spoken by the inhabitants of the Heavens; and when the angels of the Heavens have made their blessing of him, that blessing for him is carried down to him

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[378] Job 2:3–7 (New American Standard Version)

> to the angels on earth. Now nothing was concealed from Iblīs as he was not barred from access to any of the Heavens and in there, he stood wherever he desired and that is how he was able to reach Adam and banished him from the Garden… And in this manner, he heard the gathering of angels who were praising Job… therefore, Iblīs swiftly ascended to the heavens until he climbed on to a place where he used to stand and said, "O my God, I have looked into the situation of Your slave Job and found him to be a man whom You have blessed, and he thanked You. You have kept him in good health, and he praised You. However, You have not put him to the test by afflicting him with any adversity or calamity. I guarantee You that if You strike him with an ordeal, he will surely blaspheme You and abandon You.[379]

This version of the story depicts Iblīs as the ultimate, albeit concealed, confidant of God who can come and go to the Heaven as he pleases, stand wherever he desires— which can be interpreted to mean that in the ranks of the angels he can stand closest to God if he so wishes— and have access to any celestial information that he seeks. By starting the tale with the depiction of Gabriel as the most revered angel and then describing Iblīs's ability to have all the privileges of Gabriel, namely full access to all the affairs of the Heavens, the author hints at the possibility that Iblīs's rank could have superseded that of Gabriel in terms of closeness to God even after his fall. It is indicated that even his old spot was saved for him should he choose to return. Iblīs also appears here to work as the counsel to God by reminding Him that Job was yet to be tested in order to determine the veracity of his faith.

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[379] al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 153–54.

al-Ṭabarī provides a slightly different version of this story. He relates that it was not Satan, as the Book of Job has it, but Iblīs, who became jealous and asked God to give him dominion over Job so that he might tempt him away from the faith. God gave Iblīs dominion over all of Job's possession with the exception of his body and mind.[380] Iblīs gathered all of the grand satanic fiends and demons (*ʿafārīt al-shayāṭīn waʿuẓamāʾuhum*) who were under his command and told them: "What power and knowledge do you have? For I have been given dominion over Job's possessions. The calamities which befall one's possessions are the true test for men." All the grand fiends and demons told Iblīs what power they had, and he sent them down (*arsalahum*) and they destroyed all of Job's possessions.[381] Job, however, was unmoved by this calamity and still worshipped God. When Iblīs saw this, he asked God to give him power over Job's children, and when God granted his wish, he killed all his children and then came to Job broken and shattered, in the form of his children's teacher, who had taught them wisdom (*ḥikma*). Iblīs lamented so much that eventually, Job, overcame with grief and in anguish, placed a fistful of dust on his own head. Iblīs rejoiced when this happened, but Job later repented, and the angels took the news of his repentance up to the heavens, reaching God before Iblīs did.

When the loss of his children and wealth did not stop Job from worshipping God, Iblīs became impatient with him and asked God to give him dominion over Job's body. God once more granted Iblīs's request but excluded his dominion over Job's mind, tongue, and heart.[382] Unlike the Book of Job, al-Ṭabarī's account does not report any dialogue between God and the Devil about the reasons for the second request, just that God granted it without any inquiry. Iblīs came to Job and blew into his nostrils a breath which made his body to start to rot from within; but

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[380] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:322–23.
[381] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:323.
[382] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:323.

despite his agonizing pain and suffering, Job refused to be ungrateful toward God. As al-Thaʿlabī relates, this made Iblīs impatient and he called a gathering all his demons with one loud cry. They came and asked him what his desire was, and he told them: "This slave of God has resisted me. I have asked my Lord [i.e., God] to give me dominion over his possessions and children… and over his body… [yet] I have been embarrassed before my Lord and therefore called upon you to help me against him."[383] The way Iblīs described his predicament by repeatedly using the phrase "my Lord" appears as if God had commanded him to do his outmost to lead Job astray, and when he kept failing, he became ashamed towards his Lord for not fulfilling his mission.

The demons tell Iblīs that the best way to get to Job is through his wife. One of the most intriguing versions of this story is narrated by al-Thaʿlabī:

> When Job prevailed over Iblīs, who was unable to do anything to him, Iblīs appeared to Job's wife with a countenance unlike any other human in splendour, form, and beauty, riding on a mount (*markab*) distinct from any of those that people ride, marvellous, magnificent and beautiful. Then he said to her: "Are you the mate of Job the Plagued One?" She said, "Yes." Iblīs said: "And do recognize me?" She said, "No." He said, "I am the god of the earth, and did to your mate what I did because he served the God of Heaven and he abandoned and enraged me. If he had prostrated himself before me only once, I would have reinstated to you both all the wealth and children you had, for they are in my possession." Then he showed all of them to her at the bottom of the valley where they met.[384]

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[383] al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 161.
[384] al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 162.

This is one of the best examples of Iblīs depicted as the most magnificent and beautiful figure who also rides on an exquisite and unique mount, perhaps not unlike the horse Burāq, which the Prophet Muḥammad rode in his "ascension to the heavens" (*miʿrāj*). This regal appearance of Iblīs is confirmed by his statement about his divine nature as he emulates God on earth. Iblīs was not lying to Job's wife when he told her that it was, he who afflicted Job with all those miseries and that by having absolute authority over Job's possessions, children, and health, he had the right to claim divinity on earth. He is also correct in pointing out that all of Job's miseries were caused by his worshipping the God of Heaven. Given Iblīs's abilities and intelligence, it is hard to imagine that he made such a proposition without full knowledge of the fact that Job was going to refuse it. What he proposed to Job's wife was rather an imitation of what God had ordered him to do on that fateful day, namely to prostrate himself once before Adam in order to keep his heavenly rank and glory. This was the final test for Job at the hands of Iblīs, who in this story, appears as the vicegerent of God on earth. After all, it was not Iblīs, but God, who put Job to the test; and as the divine executer of this cosmic wager, Iblīs succeeded in implementing the test perfectly.

In a later version of this story in his *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* Rabghūzī relates that Iblīs, who was becoming frustrated with Job's steadfastness, assumed the appearance of a human and said: "O Job, why don't you call upon God to deliver you from this misfortune?" Job replied: "For seventy years I lived in wealth and affluence. If I spend another seventy years in affliction and misery, what does it matter?" Iblīs said: "This is most astonishing. How am I to seduce someone from the right path who sees seventy years of trouble ahead for himself?" Job said: "You are not Iblīs, are you?" Iblīs answered: "I am. O Job, pray that God may deliver you from this trial. Then you will

be rid of me, and I will be rid of you." Job replied: "May the Lord protect me from your wickedness!"[385]

In all the versions of this story, one thing is clear: Job was an innocent and God-fearing individual who, without having committed any sin, became the subject of a wager between God and the Devil. In al-Ṭabarī's narrative, Iblīs was depicted as more than a simple devil. He was the commander of the grandees among the demons and fiends, and similar to the way in which God sent down (*arsala*) the angels to prophets, Iblīs sent down his minions to do his bidding. In this particular story, it is Iblīs who was running the show and choosing what sorts of calamities would befall Job; and in all this, God was complicit and in full cooperation with the Devil. In the story of Job, Iblīs appears as the darling of God who had been given *carte blanche* to test Job in any way he saw fit. Throughout the story, Job was never informed of all that had transpired between God and Iblīs, and all the agonies appear to have been inflicted upon Job so that God could prove a point to Iblīs— which only demonstrates how high Iblīs's status must have been in the sight of God. al-Thaʿlabī even states that Iblīs was doing Job a service by making him go through tribulation and suffering: "By God, Iblīs had full knowledge that God did not give him dominion over Job except as a mercy [upon Job], so that Jobs's reward may be increased and to make him the example for the patient ones, and a reminder to the worshippers who suffer any calamity, to emulate his perseverance and his hopefulness for the recompense."[386]

As al-Ṭabarī relates, the Devil, in the form of Satan, was also involved in the major events of other prophets. It is reported that Satan came to Joseph when he was in prison, and made him forget God; instead of God, Joseph asked the Pharaoh's winemaker, who was his cellmate, to

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[385] al-Rabghūzī, *Stories of the Prophets*, 2:243.
[386] al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 156.

intercede on his behalf after he was freed. In another Qurʾanic tale, when Moses set out to find the elusive Khiżr, God commanded him to "Take a fish and wherever you lose the fish that is the place where you find Khiżr." Moses and his companion took a fish for consumption, but when Moses left the fish on a stone, Satan made him forget about the fish and continue on his journey. Moses also blamed Satan for making him accidently kill the Egyptian who was beating one of the Israelites. Yet all of these seemingly evil incidences led to very positive and life-altering outcomes. Had it not been for the murder of the Egyptian, Moses would not have left Egypt to ultimately meet God on Mount Sinai. Also, if Moses had not forgotten the fish, he would not have returned to the same place where he had lost it— which ultimately led him to meet Khiżr.

al-Thaʿlabī relates that Iblīs even loved Moses. According to him, Iblīs was once asked: "Have you ever loved anyone among the people of the world?" He said: "No, except for Moses, son of Amram, may peace be upon him." They asked him: "How come?" Iblīs replied: "Because God Almighty said: 'And I endow you with the love from Me (Q 20:39).' Therefore, I could not abstain from loving him."[387] This excerpt has significant esoteric implications. It means that if God truly loves someone, Iblīs will have to follow suit. This sharing of divine love with Iblīs will be discussed in more detail in the following chapters.

According to Nīshābūrī, Moses was ordered by God to choose seventy Israelites and take them to Mount Sinai so that they might hear God's voice. They arrived and heard God's speech, but afterwards Iblīs beguiled them so that they said to Moses: "It is possible that it was the voice of Satan who spoke to you."[388] Moses tried to convince them that it was indeed God's voice, but the Israelites did not believe him and said that they wanted to see God face to face. This was an

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[387] al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 172.
[388] al-Nīshābūrī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, 211.

amazing feat by Iblīs, because while God and one his chief prophets were unable to make believers out of the Israelites, Iblīs had the power to convince them that God's voice was his own and thereby kept them in doubt.

Iblīs also had the ability to appear and interfere in the most intimate moments between God and his prophets. According to Nīshābūrī, Iblīs had a significant part in the famous and esoteric exchange between God and Moses. According to Qurʾan, Moses had a visionary encounter with God on Mount Sinai that is related as follows:

> When Moses arrived at Our appointed time and his Lord spoke to him, he said: "My Lord, show me Yourself that I may look upon You." God said, "You will not see Me, but gaze upon the mountain! If it stands still in its place, then you shall see Me."[389]

Muslim theologians, exegetes, and Sufis wrote volumes on the nature and meaning of this exchange. Nīshābūrī's explanation as to the reason for God's refusal to show Himself to Moses is the most intriguing. As he relates:

> When Moses addressed God and heard His voice, he was overjoyed by what he heard. Iblīs was standing on a rock and called to Moses, saying: "O Moses, with whom are you speaking?" Moses said: "With God." Iblīs said to Moses: "How do you know that this is the voice of God which speaks to you and makes you hear and [yet] you do not see Him? Maybe it is something else." In that instance, Moses said [to God]: "Show me Yourself that I may look upon You." God said: "'You will not see Me' (Q 7:143),

[389] Q 7:142–43

> because you have asked this of me due to the temptation of Satan." And it is not befitting to see the Merciful One (*raḥmān*) based on the temptation of Satan.[390]

Nīshābūrī then answers the inquiry as to why Iblīs was allowed to be present in the most intimate moment between God and Moses by reminding the reader that even when a believer is in prayer and makes supplication to God—which according to the prophet Muḥammad is the road to salvation— he is not immune from the Devil's interference. Nīshābūrī draws an analogy to the temptation of Adam and explains that if Iblīs was allowed to be present in the Garden, then he had been granted permission by God to tempt humans wherever he wants; so that in the end God may make manifest his mercy and forgiveness. Therefore, one of Iblīs's roles was to facilitate the manifestation of God's mercy. Furthermore, this story reveals that Iblīs was the confidant of God and privy to all the conversations, even the most intimate one between God and a prophet.

As the story goes, after God refused Moses's request to see His face, He told him to behold the mountain. As He revealed Himself to the mountain, it shattered to pieces at His sight, as a result of which Moses fell to the ground unconscious. Nīshābūrī states that one interpretation of this event according to esotericists (*ahl-i maʿnā*) was that when Moses heard God speaking to him without an intermediary, he asked himself: "Who is like me? Does God have a servant as great as I?" God did not like this and as a result, manifested Himself to the mountain, which shattered and rendered Moses unconscious; and when Moses gained consciousness, he repented.[391] This utterance by Moses is similar to what was said about how Iblīs felt when he was in the service of God. In both cases, these great figures became haughty because of their position, and God punished them both; but the question is: should this utterance by Moses be viewed in the same manner as

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[390] al-Nīshābūrī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 235.
[391] al-Nīshābūrī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 237.

the paradoxical utterances of mystics (*shaṭḥiyāt*), and therefore an excusable one? If so, then by extension, it can be argued that Iblīs's claim to grandeur could have been uttered in a moment of ecstasy, and by the same token should also be excused.

Iblīs also mocked Pharaoh for his claim to divinity. According to al-Thaʿlabī, Iblīs once appeared to Pharaoh in human form while the latter was bathing, and Pharaoh did not recognize him. Iblīs asked him: "Woe to you, do you not recognize me?" Pharaoh replied: "No." Iblīs then jeeringly asked: "How is that possible when you are the one who created me? Are you not the one who said: 'I am your Lord, the Highest' (Q 79:24)?" In his derision of Pharaoh's claim to divinity, Iblīs, as the example par excellence of the ones who had fallen from grace because of their pride, also made a point about the folly of haughtiness. After all, Iblīs had known God before the creation of man, worshipped Him for thousands of years, conversed with Him, and even challenged His command. Therefore, Iblīs had every right to ridicule Pharaoh for claiming to be a god.

Iblīs also appears as the examiner of the genuineness of the faith of those who claim to be pious. In the tale of Korah, who in the Qurʾan is called Qārūn, Iblīs was a catalyst in testing Korah's faith and making him the richest man among the Israelites. According to al-Thaʿlabī:

> Qārūn had been staying on a mountain for forty years, worshipping God, until he had outdone all of the Israelites in worship. Iblīs sent out (*baʿatha*) his satanic minions to him, but they were unable to overcome him. Therefore, he himself went to him and began to worship together with him. Iblīs began to surpass him in worship and outdid him, and Qārūn surrendered himself to him. Iblīs said to him: "O Qārūn! This will suffice us; we shall not be present at the congregation of the Israelites, nor visit any sick person among them, nor be present at any funeral." Then he brought him down from the mountain to a temple, and they [i.e., Israelites] would bring them food. Then

> Iblīs said to him: "O Qārūn! We are both content in this manner, over the Israelites." And Qārūn said to him: "What do you have in mind?" Iblīs said: "We will earn money on one Friday and worship the rest of the Fridays." The two of them earned money on Friday and worshipped on all the others. Then Iblīs said, "This will suffice us," but Qārūn said: "What is on your mind?" Iblīs said, "Let us earn one day, worship one day, and give charity and alms." When they earned one day and worshipped one day, Iblīs sat down and left him. Then the gates of this world were opened for him, and his wealth became enormous.[392]

Qārūn became the richest man among the Israelites, and became haughty and tyrannical, and denied God. Moses prayed to God to punish him and as a result, the earth opened up and he was buried alive with all of his wealth. The most remarkable aspect of this story is not that Iblīs was capable of turning himself into a pious hermit in order to seduce Qārūn, although that in itself is an impressive and thought-provoking feat, but the fact that he did absolutely no wicked deed and yet he succeeded in leading Qārūn astray. Earning a livelihood is never frowned upon in Judaism or Islam, and both faiths in fact encourage the honest earning of money. Iblīs even encouraged Qārūn to continue to worship and give to charity. All Iblīs did was to suggest a balanced approach to prayers and earning a livelihood, but he also knew that once any man begins to acquire a taste for wealth, he will most certainly be consumed by his own greed to acquire ever more.

Even the prophets of Israel were tested by Iblīs. It is also related that the prophet David asked God to test him the way He had tested Abraham and Jacob. God then warned him: "You will be tested, so be prepared."[393] Another rendition of this story has it that once David thought to

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[392] al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 214.
[393] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:480.

himself that he was able to spend an entire day without committing any sin; and it was on that day that he was tested.[394] As al-Ṭabarī explains, when David was praying in a secluded section of his palace, Satan, in the form of a golden dove, alighted at his feet, and when David tried to catch it , it flew away. David chased the golden dove and the dove flew toward the house in which a beautiful woman was bathing. This woman was none other than the famous Biblical Bathsheba, the wife of David's general, Uriah the Hittite. According to 2 Samuel 11: 2–4, David saw her one day when she was bathing, and he was mesmerised by her beauty and lusted for her, so he summoned her to his palace, slept with her, and made her pregnant while she was still married to Uriah. After David found out that she was married to his general Uriah, he sent him away on several battles with the hope that he would be killed. David succeeded in getting rid of Uriah and married Bathsheba, for which he was severely chastised by God. In all of al-Ṭabarī's narratives, Bathsheba is reported to be the wife to Uriah when David lusted for her, but the difference is that according to al-Ṭabarī, David did not sleep with her before Uriah was killed in battle.

Three points in this story stand out. Firstly, the fact that God tested David with the help of the Devil demonstrates that the Devil also had the role of examiner of a prophet's faith. Secondly, the transformation of Satan into a dove, which in all Abrahamic religions is a symbol of good tidings, peace, and even the Holy Spirit, appears to be an interesting choice. Thirdly, it is noteworthy that in the Qurʾan, the word *khalīfa* ("vicegerent") in its singular form is only used twice; once in reference to Adam when God announced to the angels "I will appoint a viceregent on earth (Q 2:30), and again when God told David "I had made you vicegerent on earth, so judge among people justly and do not follow your own desires, for it will lead you astray from God's path (Q 38:26)." It is no coincidence that in both cases, God warned his vicegerents, Adam and

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[394] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:479–80.

David, about the folly of following their own desires, and yet both failed God exactly because of that and were deceived by the Devil. It seems that in this tale the Devil proved to God that weak-willed individuals such as Adam and David were poor choices for the lofty title of "God's vicegerent on the earth." Therefore, Iblīs had every right to refuse to prostrate himself before such a feeble figure as Adam.

In a tale about David's son Solomon, Iblīs appears not as the examiner of the prophets, but as someone who taunts and teases the demons and devils. It is related that King Solomon had a legion of jinn and devils (*shayāṭīn*) toiling for him and making for him whatever he wished, such as marvelous buildings, stables, and statues. He commanded them to lift heavy stones and carry them wherever he desired, and he would torment or release any of the Devils he wished. As al-Thaʿlabī relates:

> Iblīs dressed himself up for them while they were toiling with heavy labour and told them: "How are you?" They replied: "We are unable to bear the condition we are in." Iblīs said: "Do you carry stones and return empty-handed, carrying nothing?" They said: "Yes." He replied: "Then you are in comfort." The wind carried this information to Solomon, so he commanded that they carry [stones] both ways when going and returning. Then Iblīs came to them and said: "How are you?" They complained to him and informed him that they were carrying both ways when going and returning, so Iblīs said to them: "Do you sleep at night?" They said: "Yes." So Iblīs said: "Then you are in comfort." The wind carried this information to Solomon, and he commanded them to work by day and night. Iblīs adorned himself for them and they complained to him that they were working night and day and that they were exhausted from toiling, and he said: "How are you?" They said: "We are unable to bear the condition we are in."

> So Iblīs asked them: "Whatever he [i.e., Solomon] wishes, he does?" They said: "Yes." He said: "Then expect respite, for the matter has reached a conclusion." They did not have to wait for long before Solomon died.[395]

In this rather amusing story, it appears that Iblīs does not concern himself with the welfare of his fellow devils, and if anything, he is adding to their suffering while helping Solomon to increase his production. He is obviously taunting the devils by dresses himself up every time he goes to see them and also by telling them that they are in comfort. His real intention, however, appears to find out the time of Solomon's death by way of encouraging the king to do all that he desires, because as this take suggests, when a man reaches a point where he can do whatever he desires, that is when he dies. The fact that Solomon was unable to also make Iblīs work for him is noteworthy. It shows that Iblīs was unlike any of the demons or devils who could be tamed and chained, and that God did not give Solomon permission to chain him. al-Thaʿlabī informs us that Solomon only managed to ask Iblīs one question about what human activities he loved the most. Iblīs responded by saying: "If your rank were not so high in the eyes of God, I would not inform you," and he went on to say that he loved sodomy and lesbianism the most.[396]

In some of these stories Satan, rather than Iblīs, is the active agent who beguiles the prophets and tries to lead them astray. Most of these events, while significant, only involve Satan in the mundane activities of the prophets. Iblīs on the other hand, is often depicted as an observer who usually does not concern himself with the petty affairs of humans/prophets, and only gets involved in more significant events. One instance of such involvement is in the story of Jesus's birth. al-Ṭabarī relates that when Jesus was born, all the idols were toppled. This frightened all of

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[395] al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 326.
[396] al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 42.

the *shayāṭīn*, but they were unaware of the cause. They all rushed to Iblīs, who was sitting alone on his throne, which he had set up in the middle of a deep green ocean, mimicking God's Throne in the heavens (*ʿarsh*).[397] In imitation of God, he had also veiled himself by many veils of light, and when he saw the gathering of *shayāṭīn*, he was alarmed because since he had dispersed them, he had never see them all together. As al-Ṭabarī explains, six hours of daylight were still remaining when all the demons came to Iblīs and told him what had transpired, and that they had searched all the lands and seas and did not find anything. He told them: "This is something significant and I know it was kept hidden from me."[398] He then flew and searched for three hours before he finally came to the place where Jesus was born and saw a great number of angels gathered there. He wanted to get close, but the angels would not allow him. He then returned to the demons and told them: "I come to you after exploring the entire earth, east and west, land and sea, the four realms of the world, and the upper sphere. I managed to do that in three hours." Then he informed them about the birth of Christ: "It was concealed from me. No female womb has ever conceived a child without my knowledge, and none has given birth without my presence. I am hoping that I lead more people astray by this child than he can guide." [399] Balʿamī attributes the part about the presence of Iblīs at the birth of every child to a *hadith* from the Prophet Muḥammad which says: "No child except Jesus, son of Mary, was ever born without Iblīs assigning a demon (*dīv*) to be in charge (*muwakkil*) of that child."[400]

The imagery associated with Iblīs in this story is one of magnificence and majesty. He separated himself from the rest of the devils and sits on a throne in the middle of a green ocean.

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[397] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1:595–96.
[398] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1: 596.
[399] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1: 596.
[400] Balʿamī, *Tārīkh*, 2:759.

This is reminiscent of Qurʾan 11:7, which states: "And it is He [God] who created the heavens and the earth in six days, and His Throne was upon the water." Both God's and Iblīs's throne are on the water. The color green, which in Islam is associated with the Prophet Muḥammad and is the color of the clothes of the righteous in Paradise (Q 18:31) and of the cushions on which they lean, is not usually associated with Iblīs. After all, Iblīs was created from fire. But there is another place in the Qurʾan where fire and the color green are juxtaposed, and that is Qurʾan 36:80, which says: "It is God who appointed for you fire from the green tree and behold! You kindle from it." So, it might be possible for Iblīs to be portrayed as being the representative of both elements, namely the punishing nature of fire and the serenity of the color green.

Iblīs was also portrayed by al-Ṭabarī as a god-like figure sitting on his throne behind veils of light. He also searches for Jesus not in the dark of night, the way one might expect him to do, but in the middle of the day when six hours of daylight still remained. This challenges the prevalent image of the Devil, which is usually associated with darkness. Furthermore, Iblīs introduces himself as an omniscient being who has knowledge of every child's conception and boasts of being present at the birth of every child. Qurʾan 31: 34 states that only God knows what is in the womb, and Q 13:8, states: "Only God knows what every female carries in her womb and what the wombs lose or produce." Therefore, Iblīs is credited with having knowledge that God alone possesses.

What is the purpose of this majestic portrayal of Iblīs in al-Ṭabarī's account? If Iblīs was the chief of the devils and the enemy of God, as al-Ṭabarī often refers to him, then why is he portrayed as imitating God, sitting inaccessibly on a throne set in a green ocean and hidden behind veils of light? Can this be attributed to the noble and celestial rank of Iblīs, portrayed here as the true, albeit hidden, vicegerent of God, mirroring His divine majesty, omniscience, and omnipresence?

al-Ṭabarī relates that when Jesus began his ministry, Iblīs appeared in the form of a respectable sage, accompanied by two of the *shayāṭīn* who also looked like him, and they mingled with a group of men.[401] As Jesus began to perform miraculous deeds by healing the crippled and blind, Iblīs appeared with a mesmerizingly beautiful face and told the people who were attracted to him that Jesus, who performed so many miracles, must be God. One of his companion *shayāṭīn* rebuked Iblīs for claiming such a thing, saying that God could not appear in human form nor could He come out of a woman's womb, and therefore Jesus must be the son of God. A third *shayṭān* said that what they claimed was evil and they were both wrong as it did not befit God to have a child, hence Jesus was a god along with God. After they finished quarrelling, all three disappeared and were never seen again.[402] According to al-Ṭabarī this caused Christians to quarrel among themselves and, ever since, to err about the nature of Jesus. As discussed in Chapter 1, Iblīs was a master of this kind of amusing performance and well-rehearsed drama, as he had played it for the first time in the role of God's antagonist. This spectacle demonstrates that Iblīs could assume a misleading form if he so desired and could perform his role convincingly.

In the *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, there is a passage about an esoteric interaction between Iblīs and John the Baptist which reveals many new aspects of Iblīs's character. al-Thaʿlabī relates:

> The Prophet Muḥammad once said: "There is no human who has neither committed a sin nor had the intention to do so, except for John, son of Zachariah, who had neither committed a sin, nor had the intention to do so." John once said: "O Lord, show me Iblīs as he really is, and insist that he does not conceal anything that I may ask him." Hence, God Almighty sent a revelation (*auḥiya*) to Iblīs: "Go to My servant John, son

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[401] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1: 598.
[402] al-Ṭabarī, *Tārīkh*, 1: 598.

> of Zachariah, exactly as you were when you descended to earth, and do not hide from him anything that he asks you." Therefore, Iblīs went to John and said: "John, I am Iblīs. My Lord commanded me to come to you, just as I was when I descended to earth." John looked at him and saw swallows hovering above his head, while his waist was surrounded by nests, scattered all around him, and on his feet were anklets. John asked: "What are these swallows that hover above your head?" Iblīs answered: "With them I snatch the intellects of humans." John asked: "And what are these anklets which are on your feet?" Iblīs said: "I move them for man until he sings, or someone sings to him." John asked: "At what hour do you have the most influence over men?" He replied: "When he has finished eating." John said: "Have you found anything [abominable] in my soul?" Iblīs replied: "No." John said: "Not ever?" Iblīs said: "Yes, one night, after you had fasted, your food was given to you and I made you crave for it so much that you ate more than your usual portion, thus it made you so sated that you did not bother to perform your usual prayers and devotional practices." John said: "Certainly I shall never eat my fill again." Then Iblīs said: "Certainly I will never give honest advice to a human being again."[403]

The description of Iblīs in this tale suggests that he was both physically and psychologically a mighty figure and had great influence over humans. This encounter with its apocalyptic undertone is a further confirmation that Iblīs was a celestial and loyal agent of God who, similar to the angels and prophets, received revelation (*waḥy*) and obeyed God's commands. God could have forced Iblīs to go to John, but instead he asked him through a revelation, the medium that is often used

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[403] al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 42.

for the great prophets. Iblīs in turn recognized God as his Lord and told John that he was sent to him by God to manifest his true self to him and divulge any secret about which John might inquire. John, however, seemed to be interested in the mundane and did not ask about some of the more esoteric secrets which Iblīs concealed. Why was Iblīs described here as an angelic being who obeyed God's command while the orthodox Islamic narratives often point to the contrary, depicting him as a malicious and disobedient Satan? What reward did Iblīs gain by obeying God's command in manifesting his true self and divulging his secrets to John and giving him honest advice? Surely, if he was able to disobey God's command once, which caused him his supposed eternal damnation, he could have done it again. Yet he obeyed God wholeheartedly, thereby demonstrating the depth and complexity of his relationship with God.

The majesty and awe-inspiring form of Iblīs is also described in another passage of the *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*. It is said that Iblīs appeared to a group of Israelites who asked him: "Stand in the same manner in which you used to stand in the presence of God, before you defied your Lord." Iblīs replied: "You cannot bear the sight of it." They pleaded with him, so Iblīs stood the way he used to stand, and when they looked at him and saw his humbleness and submissiveness, every one of them fell dead.[404] The only time that Israelites fell dead at the sight of something divine was when they asked Moses to see the face of God and as a result died by means of a thunderbolt (Q 2:55). This vision of God is also reported in Qurʾan 7:143, where Moses asked God to see His face and God replied that seeing Him would annihilate Moses. It seems that the sight of Iblīs could have the same effect as the vision of God.

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[404] al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 43.

Iblīs also had run-ins with minor prophets such as Jirjīs. According to Balʿamī, Jirjīs was once able to grab Iblīs by the hair and asked him what pleasure he obtained from leading people astray. Iblīs responded:

> "O Jirjīs, I want to destroy all the slaves of God and take them all with me to Hell. If they give me the kingdom of heaven and earth, it would not give me as much pleasure as leading one human being astray. Know, O Jirīs, that dominion over the entire earth was mine before God gave it to Adam. God told me to prostrate myself before Adam; all the angels including Gabriel and Michael and Isrāfīl prostrated themselves, but I refused. I relinquished all my kingdom, yet I was unconcerned."[405]

As soon as Jirīs heard this, he let Iblīs go, perhaps out of bafflement. Iblīs was shown here as a bold and uncompromising being who reminds one of the minor prophets about his glorious past and his plans for humanity. It is as if Iblīs were telling Jirjīs: "How dare you question my motives when I had a quarrel with God Himself and refused His command." By reminding Jirjīs that even the greatest of the angels such as Gabriel had capitulated to God's command and perhaps lost their dignity when they bowed down to Adam, he, on the other hand, stood firm and refused to relent even if it meant losing his celestial rank and his kingdom. From then on, his mission was to prove to God that Adam and his progeny had not been worthy of his prostration.

There is also a long story in Nīshābūrī's *Qiṣaṣ* about the enigmatic Qurʾanic tale (22:45) concerning the people of the city of the Abandoned Well (*al-biʾr al-muʿaṭṭala*), and how Iblīs brought them to ruin. As Nīshābūrī relates, some people used to live in a city founded by a fugitive vizier, who had built a magnificent golden palace around a newly discovered fresh-water well in

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[405] Balʿamī, *Tārīkh*, 2:871-72

the middle of the desert. The people were prosperous and thanked God, while Iblīs was looking for a way to tempt them. One day, Iblīs appeared as an old woman with her head uncovered and pretending to be mad. When the vizier saw her, he ordered his guard to arrest her and put her in jail. In jail, Iblīs, as the old woman, began to worship God, and when the vizier heard this, he said that this old woman might have knowledge of the universe, so he and his courtiers asked her many questions and she answered them all. Then the people of the city went to her and asked her questions, and one day a woman asked her whether it was permissible for them to turn to lesbianism while their husbands were away on long journeys. The old woman said yes, it is permissible, and when they began to engage in it, Iblīs disappeared. After a few days, Iblīs reappeared in the form of an ascetic (*ʿābid*), carrying a staff and wearing a Sufi felt cloak (*palās*). He prayed for a while and did not eat anything. When the vizier was informed, he asked him several questions, all of which Iblīs answered. One day, a man came to him and asked whether they could engage in bestiality because they went on long journeys and were away from their wives. Iblīs said yes, and after the people engaged in it, he disappeared.

Then God sent to this city a prophet named Abū Qaḥāfa, who warned the people that if they did not stop their sinful ways and repent, God would cause the well to dry up. The people responded that it was not God who gave them water and that two holy individuals had taught them these acts. God then sent Gabriel, who by the touch of his wing caused the well to dry up. The people were demoralised when Iblīs appeared once more, this time as a sage (*pīr*) who told them that they should ask their prophet, Abū Qaḥāfa, to pray so that the well would be filled once more. They went to Abū Qaḥāfa and begged him to pray and promised to convert to the true faith only after the well filled up. He prayed; the well became filled with fresh water; and when he asked them to convert, they refused and instead assigned one thousand men to watch over the water. God

sent Gabriel once more and the well dried up. Iblīs appeared again and told them not to be sad, as he was going to show them God. He led the people to the middle of the desert where there was a demon (*dīv*) sitting on a magnificently adorned throne surrounded by guards. Iblīs told the people: "Come and meet your God," and when the people arrived, they all prostrated themselves before the throne. The demon told them: "Rise! I am pleased with you. Now go home and when you wake up in the morning, worship whatever you see in front of you." The people went home, and when they woke up the next morning, they saw many idols in the palace and around the city and began to worship them. God was finally fed up with them and sent Gabriel, who by one touch of his wing destroyed the city, the palace, and all of its inhabitants.[406]

This amusing tale depicts how Iblīs was given a free hand to toy with and mock an entire community with impunity. In this story, he appears in multiple forms and is able to overpower a prophet sent by God and lead an entire community astray. His appearances as a sage and an ascetic who prays to God and knows the secrets of the universe would later be employed by the Persian mystics to convey a more serious and esoteric range of topics. In other places in Nīshābūrī's *Qiṣaṣ*, Iblīs is also credited with having introduced idol worshipping, fire worshipping, as well as next-of-kin marriage.[407] In all the cases, he appeared to individuals, including kings, as a *pīr*, and introduced these practices to them. It is also noteworthy that, as in many other tales, Iblīs only confirmed and granted people their inner desires by way of innovating new customs and practices which they have already been drawn to even before Iblīs introduced them.

Iblīs also had a role in the life of the Prophet Muḥammad. Masʿūdī relates that when Muḥammad was young, before he was chosen as a prophet, he ended a quarrel between the

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[406] al-Nīshābūrī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 354–58.
[407] al-Nīshābūrī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyā'*, 393–95.

Quraysh's elders. When the Quraysh decided to rebuild the Kaʿba, they all wanted to place the Black Stone into the wall of the Kaʿba; but after a long quarrel, they all decided that Muḥammad, who was a trustworthy youth, would arbitrate among them. It is said that after Muḥammad solved the problem, Iblīs appeared in the form of a sage and said to the elders of the Quraysh: "It is very strange that all these nobles and qualified leaders and elders chose to follow the one who is youngest and least wealthy and made him their leader. I swear by al-Lāt and al-ʿUzzā [the two great goddesses of pre-Islamic Arabia] that he will overcome them [i.e., the Quraysh elders] and will divide booty among them and will achieve greatness."[408] In this narrative, Iblīs appeared as a diviner, prophesying the future victory and greatness of the Prophet Muḥammad.

According to another narrative related by Abū Naṣr al-Muṭahhar al-Maqdisī (fl. 4th/10th century) in his *al-Badʾ wa al-tārīkh*, Iblīs played a prominent role in the plot to assassinate the Prophet Muḥammad. When the elders of Quraysh decided to assassinate Muḥammad in Mecca, they were not sure how to proceed. They had gathered in a place called Dār al-Nadwa to discuss their plot when Iblīs, in the form of an exalted sage (*shaykh jalīl*) who was wearing a sleeveless robe, appeared to them. They asked who he was, and someone answered that he was a sage from the Najd area who had come to advise them. After much deliberation, they all agreed with Iblīs's proposal to send one youth from every tribe to assassinate the Prophet in his home at night.[409] Nīshābūrī, however, relates that it was Abū Jahl, the Prophet's staunchest enemy, who suggested the plot, and Iblīs only confirmed it.[410] As the story goes, the Prophet was informed by Gabriel, and he left the city that same night. According to Nīshābūrī, that was the only night when Iblīs

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[408] al-Masʿūdī, *Murūj al-dhahab*, 2:214–15.

[409] Muṭahhar b. Ṭāhir al-Maqdisī, *Kitāb al-Badʾ wa al-tārīkh*, ed. and trans. Clément Huart (Paris: Leroux, 1899–1919), 4:168.

[410] al-Nīshābūrī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, 420.

slept, and when he woke up he howled: "Muḥammad is gone!"[411] The plot was unsuccessful, and Muḥammad escaped to Medina, an event that marked the beginning of the Islamic calendar. al-Maqdisī's narrative suggests that Iblīs indirectly triggered the Prophet's emigration to Medina, which launched his career as a political leader.

Balʿamī provides an account of the end of the world in which all humans and animals on earth and all the angels in heaven would die and no one would be left alive except the angel Gabriel, Azrāʾīl the Angel of Death, and Iblīs. After demonstrating that He is the only inheritor of heaven and earth, God will then bring death upon these three and He alone will remain.[412] Here Iblīs is mentioned in the same rank with the two archangels, which demonstrates his significance even in events leading to the apocalypse.

al-Ṭabarī, and subsequently Balʿamī, also mention the mythical Iranian king Jamshīd (Av. Yima; MP Jam), who lived for a very long time, did many wondrous deeds, and had an encounter with Iblīs. al-Ṭabarī's account of this encounter is very straightforward, but Balʿamī gives a colorful report of it with an esoteric undertone. According to Balʿamī, one day when Jamshīd was sitting alone on his throne and deep in thought, Iblīs came down to him from a hole in the wall and stood before him. Jamshīd was frightened and asked him who he was. Iblīs answered: "I am one of the angels and I have come from heaven to give you advice." Jamshīd asked: "What is your advice?" Iblīs told him: "First tell me who you are." Jamshīd said: "I am one of the children of Adam." Iblīs responded:

> "You are not. Many people have become sick and died but not you. You are the god of heaven and earth. You do not know yourself. You were in heaven and you created the

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[411] al-Nīshābūrī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, 421.
[412] Balʿamī, *Tārīkh*, 63–64.

> earth. In heaven you used to tend to the affairs of heaven, and you came to earth so that you could tend to its affairs and dispense justice and then you will return to heaven. You have forgotten about yourself. I am one of your angels and I am greatly in your debt and have come to inform you."[413]

He then told the king that because he was god, he should be worshipped by people, and those who worshipped him should be rewarded while those who disobeyed should be burned. Jamshīd eventually followed Iblīs's advice. While exoterically this appears to be a cautionary tale about the perils of haughtiness and self-aggrandizement, esoterically this tale contains a few profound mystical elements. First and foremost, Iblīs reminds the king that he is a celestial being who has forgotten his past station and become content with being king of the earth. While Persian Sufis and mystics later expounded on this point, no one described is as profoundly as Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā ibn Ḥabash ibn Amīrak Suhravardī (d. 587/1191) the most celebrated Neoplatonist master of Illuminationist (*ishrāqī*) philosophy. In two of his Persian treatises, *Risālat al-ṭayr* as well as *ʿAql-i surkh*, the protagonist of the tale is a bird who used to fly in the heavens but is later captured and brought to earth. This allegorical bird eventually forgets about his past life but is ultimately saved by an angelic guide in the form of a sage (*pīr*) who reminds him of his celestial origin. On an esoteric level, what Iblīs told Jamshīd in this story is exactly the same, namely that he was a divine being who came to the earth and has since then forgotten about his origins. More importantly, he reminds the king to know himself. This self-knowledge is one of the tenets of Persian mysticism which was influenced by Neoplatonism. It has its origins in the Delphic maxim, "Know thyself," which became the Sufi maxim "Whoever knows himself, knows his Lord." In many Persian Sufi

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[413] Balʿamī, *Tārīkh*, 1:131–32.

texts, this concept is considered key in attaining gnosis. Take away all the exoteric negativity of this tale and what is left is an esoteric mystical episode in which Iblīs appears as an angelic sage to remind the king about his divine origins and help him to know his true self.

God and Iblīs appear to be competitors in having claim over humans. Nīshābūrī in his *Qiṣaṣ* states that "God calls the believer (*muʾmin*) His friend and when that person acquires virtues, everyone has a claim on him. Iblīs says: 'He is mine because he follows me' and his parents claim that he is theirs, but God will send the angel of death to take his life and everyone's claim will become void."[414] It is not clear how Iblīs is able to have a claim on a believer and why a believer would be the follower of Iblīs, but this demonstrates that humans are caught between the claims of Iblīs and God. This point is also raised in Thaʿlabī's *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*:

> One of the sages said: "O Progeny of Adam! Behold the peril of your position in this world. Your Lord swore: "I shall surely fill Hell with jinn and mankind all together" [Q 11:119] while Iblīs swore: "By Your Glory, I shall lead them all astray, excepting those of your slaves among them who are sincere." [Q 38:83–84] And you, miserable one, are between God and Iblīs, browbeaten yet untroubled at ease, and God knows.[415]

This reveals that when it comes to leading unbelievers astray and ultimately to Hell, God and Iblīs are working toward the same goal, a collusion that does not appear to be accidental.

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[414] al-Nīshābūrī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, 104.
[415] al-Thaʿlabī, *ʿArāʾis al-majālis*, 25.

3.2 Iblīs in Islamic Heresiology

As the first unbeliever, Iblīs had a special place in the works of Muslim heresiologists. To many, he was the originator of all heretical beliefs, and it was because of him that so many different religious sects and denominations came into being. One of the first Persian authors who wrote on the legend of Iblīs was al-Maqdisī in his *al-Badʾ wa al-tārīkh*. Before discussing Iblīs, in the chapter on the description of the angels, al-Maqdisī states that while Muslims believe the angels to have been created out of light, according to Ibn ʿAbbās, the angels were created from fire and both fire and light are one and the same in sublimity and brightness.[416] al-Maqdisī then tried to reconcile these varying narratives by concluding that the angels of mercy were created out of light and the angels of torment were created out of pure fire.[417] According to this conclusion, Iblīs fits the category of those angels who were responsible for tormenting humans. al-Maqdisī proposes that Iblīs also possessed some exceptional attributes. For instance, he states that one of the signs of the apocalypse will be two loud cries (*ṣaut*) which will come from the heavens in the middle of the month of Ramadan and make hundreds of thousands blind, deaf, and insane. The first cry will come from Gabriel and the second one from Iblīs.[418] This demonstrates that Iblīs was considered to be one of the angels who will usher in the end of time.

In his monumental *al-Āthār al-bāqiya ʿan al-qurūn al-khāliya,* Abū Rayhān al-Bīrūnī (d. ca. 440/1048) relates what he considered a strange belief of the Persians with regard to the origin of the universe. According to al-Bīrūnī, some Persians believed that Ahriman, whom he equates with Iblīs, was created from the thought of God. Then because God became perplexed regarding

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[416] al-Maqdisī, *al-Badʾ wa al-tārīkh*, 1:169.
[417] al-Maqdisī, *al-Badʾ wa al-tārīkh*, 1:169.
[418] al-Maqdisī, *al-Badʾ wa al-tārīkh*, 1:172–73.

the creation of Ahriman, He sweated; and when He touched that perspiration on His forehead and it fell to the ground, Gayumart, the first man, was created.[419] As al-Bīrūnī relates, there were several Persian authors, including Ibn al-Muqaffaʿ (d. ca. 139/757), who recounted that Ahriman had a son called Khazūra, who had the intention of killing Gayumart but was instead killed himself. Ahriman complained to God about Gayumart and demanded retribution against him so that the pact between him and God could be kept intact.[420] Gayumart was then shown all the suffering in this world as well as Judgment Day. After seeing all that, he preferred to die, and thereafter God killed him, and from two droplets of semen from his loins which dropped on the Dāmdaẕ mountain in Istakhr, two rhubarb plants sprouted up which later grew limbs and became Mīshī and Mīshiyana, the first couple.[421] The two lived happily together or fifty years, were free from the desire to eat and drink, and did not know any sorrow or pain. Then Ahriman appeared to them in the form of a sage (*shaykh*) and told them to eat from trees and made them some wine and they drank from it; from then on, they fell into misery and became rapacious and voracious.[422] The remarkable point which al-Bīrūnī made about the Devil is that he was able to bring his grievances against Gayumart to God and He, in turn, had no choice but to comply with the provisions of the pact between them, the details of which al-Bīrūnī does not reveal. This is yet another instance in which the Devil is depicted as a sage (Per. *pīr*, Ar. *shaykh*).

al-Bīrūnī states that when Zoroaster first invited king Vishtāspa to accept the Zoroastrian religion, he told him to worship God and not the Devil.[423] Although this is not a confirmation that

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[419] Abū Rayhān Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Bīrūnī, *al-Āthār al-bāqiya ʿan al-qurūn al-khāliya*, ed. Parvīz Aẕkāyī (Tehran: Markaz-i Nashr-i Mīrāṯ-i Maktūb, 1380/2001), 114.

[420] al-Bīrūnī, *al-Āthār al-bāqiya*, 115.

[421] al-Bīrūnī, *al-Āthār al-bāqiya*, 115

[422] al-Bīrūnī, *al-Āthār al-bāqiya*, 115.

[423] al-Bīrūnī, *al-Āthār al-bāqiya*, 247.

King Vishtāspa was a devil-worshipper, it nevertheless shows that the Devil was viewed by many as a deity revered enough to be worshipped. In regard to the establishment of the Iranian New Year, or Naurūz, al-Bīrūnī recounts a story from a Zoroastrian priest named Zādūya who related that once Iblīs took God's blessing away from people, namely, regardless of how much they ate or drank, they never felt satisfied. He also stopped the wind from blowing so that no plant would grow, and the world was about to be destroyed. When God saw this, He sent one of the greatest mythical Iranian king Jamshīd (Av. Yima, MP Jam) to the south, to the land where Iblīs and his followers were residing. Jamshīd stayed there for a long time until the calamity passed, and everything was renewed. It was on Naurūz that Jamshīd returned to the world once more with his face was glowing like the sun, and this day was celebrated among Iranians ever since.[424]

A few points stand out in this story. First, the story appears as a Greco-Roman myth in which the hero travels to the underworld to defeat a Hades-like deity and restores order to this world. Given the fact that al-Bīrūnī was very well-versed in the legends of other cultures, this should not come as a surprise. What is more important, however, is the fact that Iblīs was given god-like powers in this story. There are many Qurʾanic verses, including Q 2:94; Q 7:57; and Q 25:48, which state that only God controls the wind, and He sends it as a symbol of good and auspicious tidings to the world. By attributing control of the wind and seasons to Iblīs, al-Bīrūnī inadvertently elevated his status from a simple seducer of man to a deity who could alter or destroy the creation of God. Obviously, this was the result of conflating Ahriman with Iblīs, but it nonetheless points to the trend that whenever the Qurʾanic Iblīs was commingled with the dualistic Zoroastrian worldview, he assumed an exalted status, almost equal to that of a god.

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[424] al-Bīrūnī, *al-Āthār al-bāqiya*, 267–68.

By the time Abū al-Fatḥ Muḥammad al-Shahristānī (d. 548/1153), the most prominent Persian heresiologist, wrote his book *al-Milal wa al-niḥal*, the story of Iblīs was already moving toward an esoteric interpretation. According to al-Shahristānī, Iblīs was the first sceptic in the world. By refusing bow down before Adam, he became the first being to rely on his own inference opinion (*al-raʾy*) rather than submitting to God's word (*al-naṣṣ*), hence creating doubt (*shubha*).[425] From this initial doubt, seven other doubts were created and became the basis for different confessions and creeds. al-Shahristānī explains that after Iblīs's refusal to prostrate himself before Adam, a debate took place between him and the angels in which all these doubts were raised. In this debate, Iblīs made his case as follows:

> "I submit (*innī sallamta*) to the fact that the Almighty Creator is my God and the God of all creations. He is all-knowing (*ʿālim*) and powerful and no one can question His ability or will. When He intends to create something, He has but to say, "Be", and it is (*kun fa-yakūn*) [Q 16:40]. He is sagacious (*ḥakīm*), but I have several questions in regard to his wisdom." The angels asked: "What are the questions and how many?" Iblīs said: "There are seven:
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> First, since God, by the power of his omniscience, knew beforehand what I was going to do and what would become of me, why did he create me and what wisdom was there in my creation?

[425] Abū al-Fatḥ Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Karīm b. Abū Bakr Aḥmad al-Shahristānī, *al-Milal wa al-niḥal*, ed. Amīr ʿAlī Mahnā and ʿAlī Ḥasan Fāʿūr (Beirut: Dār al-Maʿrifa, 1414/1993), 1:23. Citations refer to the Dār al-Maʿrifa edition.

Second, when He created me by the decree of His will, why did He obligate me to know and worship Him? What is the wisdom in this obligation when He neither benefits from my worshipping nor suffers from my transgression?

Third, when He created me and obligated me to gain knowledge (*maʿrifa*) of Him and worship Him, I thereby attained such gnosis and worshipped him; why then did He oblige me to worship Adam and prostrate myself before him, specifically, given the fact that such an obligation would not increase my gnosis or reverence toward Him?

Fourth, when He created me and obligated me to worship Him, then obligated me about this particular one [i.e., to worship Adam], when I refused to prostrate myself before Adam, why did He curse me and banish me from the Garden? What was the wisdom in this as I have not committed any offense except to say: 'I will not prostrate myself before anyone except you! (*lā usjida illā laka*).'

Fifth, when He created me and gave me an absolute and specific obligation [i.e., to worship Adam] and I refused, and He cursed me and banished me, why did He then create a path for me to Adam until I was allowed to return to the Garden and mislead Adam into eating from the Forbidden Tree? He then expelled Adam and me from the Garden. What was the wisdom in this? For had He barred my entrance into the Garden, Adam would have remained protected against my cunning and guile, and he could have stayed comfortably in the Garden for eternity.

Sixth, when He created me and I was burdened with these obligations, and He cursed me, I was banished, yet once more I entered into the Garden. Since He knew of my enmity and hostility toward Adam, what was the wisdom in giving me dominion over his progeny to the point that I could see them, while they could not see me. In

addition, what was the wisdom in making them weak and powerless in my hands so that my temptation affected them but their incantation of 'There is no might nor power [except in God] (*lā ḥaula wa lā quwwata*)' have no effect on me? Would it not have been more sagacious if they have been created with such a temperament that my deceiving would have no effect on them and they could remain in a state of purity, obeying and worshipping God constantly without any sin or transgression?

Seventh, I submit to all these and accept them, that I was created and burdened with general and specific obligations and was cursed after refusing to prostrate myself before Adam. When I decided once more to enter into the Garden, I was allowed to do so, and when Adam fell to my temptations he was banished from the Garden; but when I asked for more time and said [to God]: 'Give me respite till the day they shall be resurrected,' He said, 'You are among the ones that are given respite [Q 15:36–37].' Why did He give me respite and what was the wisdom in that? If he had destroyed me in that instance, all the men and creation would be at rest and free from me and no evil would remain in the world. Is the existence of the universe not better served by good order (*niẓām al-khayr*) rather than its mixture with evil (*imtizājahu bi-al-sharr*)?"[426]

Iblīs then said that these are the evidences for his claim. God then told the angels:

In response, tell him that: "You are not truthful and sincere in your first claim that I am your God and the God of the creation because had you been sincere in that I am God, then you would not have questioned my orders…"[427]

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[426] al-Shahristānī, *al-Milal wa al-niḥal*, 1:23–25.
[427] al-Shahristānī, *al-Milal wa al-niḥal*, 1:25.

al-Shahristānī claims that this story is mentioned in the Gospels and the Torah, and that he has related it as it was written in those books. He also explains that after reading these queries, he was perplexed for a while, but then he realized that all the doubts in all of the creeds of the world came from these seven doubts which had been raised by Iblīs.[428]

The esoteric nature of this story is immediately revealed when Iblīs states that the number of doubts and claims are seven, an esoteric number. While exoterically most of Iblīs's arguments point to the dilemma of theodicy, the underlying issue is the set of questions that all Muslim scholars might have considered but dared not to ask. Iblīs was the representative not only of humans but of all intelligent creatures, including the angels, and the jinn, who are burdened with obligations that are often incomprehensible, and if they fail to obey God's command they are punished arbitrarily. In all of these arguments, Iblīs appears as both a philosopher and a Muslim scholastic theologian (*mutakallim*), proposing reasonable inquiries about the nature of God's wisdom in creating the Devil and letting him exist. Iblīs does not appear as the bitter, jealous, cunning and haughty creature that he is often portrayed as by Muslim theologians. In contrast, he seems very brave, unbiased, reasonable and even self-deprecating; and while he acknowledges God's supremacy and wisdom at the beginning of his debate by quoting the Qurʾan, he simply tries to enquire about a significant and obvious dilemma that is perhaps also on the minds of all humans.

In the Qurʾan, when confronted about his refusal to bow down to Adam, Iblīs defended himself by saying that he was better because, whereas he was created from fire, Adam was shaped from mud. The above-mentioned lengthy exchange, however, can be considered as Iblīs's comprehensive defence against the arbitrary judgments and decrees of God. Iblīs cites several

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[428] al-Shahristānī, *al-Milal wa al-niḥal*, 1:25.

Qurʾanic verses in his defence when he asks the angels about the wisdom of worshipping God in general and specifically about what knowledge he could have gained by prostrating himself before Adam. Given his illustrious past, Iblīs is correct to claim that he never committed any offense (*qabīḥ*) against God. What he says next, however, became the foundation for the esoteric interpretation of his story, namely that he was cursed and banished because he refused to prostrate himself before anyone but God. In the eyes of many mystics, this made him the first sincere monotheist who, paradoxically, passed God's test by disobeying His command.

Iblīs also put under scrutiny God's true intention in letting him back into the Garden after his initial banishment, as well as God's bestowal of respite on him despite knowing about his animosity toward Adam's progeny and his plans for their demise. Iblīs even went as far as to tell the angels that his destruction by God would have saved the entire world from evil. Here, Iblīs assumed the role of a potential martyr who was ready to sacrifice himself for the salvation of the entire world. It is interesting to note that, in his seventh claim, Iblīs or rather al-Shahristānī, speaks of the Zoroastrian concept of the mixture of good and evil which is attributed to God, who by letting the Devil to continue to exist, initiated the mixture. It is very possible that al-Shahristānī was familiar with the Zoroastrian polemical works, such as *Škand Gumānīk Vičār*, that discuss the deficiencies of Islamic theodicy. As Iblīs claims, he had been given such great dominion and influence over humans that the common Islamic incantation to repel evil, known as the *ḥauqala*, had no effect on him. This power had been given to him by none other than God, and hence as Iblīs rightly asserted, God was the creator and sustainer of evil.

In response to Iblīs's inquires, God did not come up with a convincing counterargument; instead, He summarily rejected Iblīs's sincerity in accepting Him as his Lord in the first place because the true believer neither disobeys God's command nor questions His wisdom. God's

response here is similar to that in the Old Testament, which demands unconditional obedience. Iblīs, on the other hand, appears to be a pragmatist and rationalist, and that is precisely why the medieval anti-rationalist, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Ibn al-Jauzī (d. 597/1200), wrote a treatise titled *Talbīs Iblīs* (Iblīs's deception) in which he argued that the philosophers and rationalists were pupils of Iblīs because they used logical argument in theological matters, just as Iblīs did.

In the above-mentioned story, the main questioner, however, was al-Shahristānī himself, who put his questions into the mouth of Iblīs so that he could avoid persecution by zealous theologians of his time. These questions were often asked during the tumultuous Islamic intellectual movements from the 9th to 12th centuries in which many theological schools and countless sub-creeds rose and fell. In al-Shahristānī's version, God was unable to answer them and instead resorted to divine tyranny over rational discourse.

In his description of heretical movements, al-Shahristānī discussed some sects who used Iblīs to explain the philosophy behind their belief systems. For instance, a Khawārij sect called Azāriqa, or the followers of Nāfiʿ ibn al-Azraq (d. 65/685), who was active in the late 7th century in southern Iran and Iraq, believed that a Muslim could become an unbeliever (*kāfir*) simply by committing a major sin (*kabīra*). To support this argument, they cited the example of Iblīs, indicating that when he refused to obey God's command, he automatically became a *kāfir*, even though he became a gnostic in acquiring the knowledge of God's oneness (*huwa ʿārif bi-waḥdāniyyat Allāh*).[429] Another sect, called the Yūnusiyya, or the followers of Yūnus b. ʿAun al-Nimīrī (d. ca 101 /720), whom al-Shahristānī categorized as "the pure Murjiʾa," also believed that although Iblīs became a *kāfir* due to his haughtiness, he had knowledge of God's oneness (*ʿārifan*

[429] al-Shahristānī, *al-Milal wa al-niḥal*, 1:141.

bi-Allāh waḥda).[430] According to them, whoever placed humility and love of God in his heart, could not commit any transgression against Him; but if he did commit a sin, as long as he had certitude (*yaqīn*) and sincerity (*ikhlāṣ*), no harm would come of it, arguing that because the believer enters Paradise not by the merits of his deeds and obedience to God, but by his earnestness and love toward God.[431] Therefore, one can deduce that by juxtaposing the name of Iblīs with the idea that certitude and sincerity rather than obedience and good deeds are key to salvation, the Yūnusiyya asserted that Iblīs, due to his certitude, which is knowledge of the Divine, had to be counted among the believers who will eventually enter Paradise.

Two centuries before al-Shahristānī, Nīshābūrī answered similar questions in his *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* about the reasons why Iblīs had been branded a *kāfir* in the Qurʾan, despite having knowledge of the oneness of God as well as worshipping Him. According to Nīshābūrī, when Iblīs refused to obey God's command to bow down before Adam, he said: "I am better and will not obey the command. I am made from light and Adam is made from darkness, and light is greater than darkness." He then said: "O God! You are mistaken, because I am better than him."[432] God gave Iblīs several reasons why clay was better than fire, but what must be stressed here is the fact that, in his reasoning, Iblīs never actually spoke of the two elements, namely fire and clay, to describe his own essence versus that of Adam and instead he compared their essences in terms of the dichotomy between light and darkness. God, on the other hand, attempted to reduce the essence of Iblīs to fire, which only burns and destroys. As Nīshābūrī explains, in the end Iblīs was not

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[430] al-Shahristānī, *al-Milal wa al-niḥal*, 1:163.
[431] al-Shahristānī, *al-Milal wa al-niḥal*, 1:163.
[432] al-Nīshābūrī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, 15.

convinced by God's reasoning and told Him: "I freely choose Hell, but I will not concede the greatness of Adam," something which supposedly made him a *kāfir*.[433]

al-Shahristānī also discusses the nature of the Devil from the perspective of various Zoroastrian sects. For instance, the Kayūmarthiyya, or the adherents of Gayumart, were a sect who claimed that there were two original principles, God, or Yazdān, who was pre-eternal (*qadīm*) and the Devil, or Ahriman, who was created. They asserted that Yazdān once wondered that, if he had an antagonist, what his nature would be. This thought was not in accordance with His luminous nature and from it, darkness was created, which was called Ahriman.[434] The nature of Ahriman was based on evil, sedition, corruption, and destruction. Soon Ahriman rebelled against the light and opposed it, both in essence and in action, and a total war took place between the army of light and the army of darkness. The angels came to arbitration and brokered a peace between the two forces, according to which the material world (*al-ʿālam al-suflā*) would belong to Ahriman for seven thousand years and thereafter it would belong to the light.[435] al-Shahristānī explains at length that there was another Zoroastrian sect, namely the Zurvanites (*Zurvāniyya*), who also believed in the creation of the Devil and the pact between him and God. According to the Zurvāniyya, the Light (*al-nūr*) began to create an individual out of light, who was spiritual, luminous, and noble, but that person named Zurvān had a doubt about something, and from that doubt, Ahriman, who is the same as Iblīs, was created.[436] There were other Zurvanites who claimed that the great Zurvān prayed (*zamzama*) 9999 years for a son and when he was unable to produce one, he pondered upon his own soul and told himself that his knowledge was not sufficient, and from this thought and

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[433] al-Nīshābūrī, *Qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ*, 15–16.
[434] al-Shahristānī, *al-Milal wa al-niḥal*, 1:278.
[435] al-Shahristānī, *al-Milal wa al-niḥal*, 1:278.
[436] al-Shahristānī, *al-Milal wa al-niḥal*, 1:279.

concern Ahriman was born. It was said that Zurvān cursed Ahriman when he learned of his evilness and banished him. As al-Shahristānī explains, there were some Zurvanites who stated that there was always something inherently vile (*shayʾ raddī*) about God, either a foul thought or an unacceptable corruption, which was the original source of the Devil.[437] This was a profound assertion as it made the Devil an inherent and inseparable part of the Divine. As will be demonstrated in the next chapter, this notion was later adapted and esotericized in the mystical woks of ʿAyn al-Qużāt Hamadānī.

As al-Shahristānī explains, some Zurvanites claimed that Ahriman had no dominion in the heavens, therefore he devised a ruse to go there. Yet others believed that he was originally in the heavens and the earth was devoid of him and then he ruptured the sky and came down to earth with his army. The Light, along with all the angels, fled and the Devil pursued them until they were all besieged in the Garden. They battled for three thousand years but the Devil could not reach God; the angels became the arbitrators and God and the Iblīs agreed upon a peace according to which Iblīs and his army could stay on the earth (or in the light) for nine thousand years as compensation for those three thousand years spent in battle, after which Iblīs and his army would return to their own place.[438] God realized that it was in His interest to accept such a detestable contract with Iblīs and they both agreed that this pact could not be broken before the end of the nine thousand years, which would cause people to live in hardship and misery for the duration. Iblīs succeeded in incorporating a clause in the agreement whereupon he would remain without any constraints and do as he pleased, and God was supposed to give him power and assist him in

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[437] al-Shahristānī, *al-Milal wa al-niḥal*, 1:280.

[438] al-Shahristānī, *al-Milal wa al-niḥal*, 1:280. In another edition of *al-Milal wa al-niḥal* it is indicated that God and Iblīs agreed that the latter and his army could stay in the light (*fī qarār al-ḍauʾ*) for nine thousand years, cf. Imām Abū al-Fatḥ Muḥammad b. ʿAbd al-Karīm al-Shahristānī, *al-Milal wa al-niḥal*, ed. Aḥmad Fahmī Muḥammad (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1413AH/1992), 263.

all of his undertakings. After the pact was concluded, two reliable witnesses testified to it by raising their swords above the heads of God and Iblīs, saying: "Whoever breaks this pact will be killed by this sword."[439]

The conditions of the pact demanded by Iblīs were also mentioned in detail from the point of view of yet another Zoroastrian sect called the Zardushtiyya, or as al-Shahristānī refers to them "the true followers of Zoroaster," who introduced a religion called Mārsiyān (perhaps the Arabized rendition of Marcionism). According to their beliefs, after the inconclusive three-thousand-year war, which was followed by arbitration, Iblīs stipulated eighteen conditions in the peace that the angels brokered between him and God. Iblīs's conditions were as follows:

> First: The means of the livelihood for his creations must come from God's creation.
>
> Second: He should be able to add his own creation to that of God.
>
> Third: His creation must have dominion over that of God.
>
> Fourth: The essence of his creation must be able to mix with that of God's creation.
>
> Fifth: He should be allowed to use the clay from which God created His creation.
>
> Sixth: He should have access to the light which was placed in God's creation.
>
> Seventh: He should have access to the winds which God's creation benefited from.
>
> Eight: He should have access to the moistness which is in God's creation.
>
> Ninth: He should have access to the fire which is in God's creation.
>
> Tenth: He must be given a free hand in the way people are drawn to each other and become friends so that he could mix the righteous ones with the evil ones.

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[439] al-Shahristānī, *al-Milal wa al-niḥal*, 1:280.

Eleventh: He should have access to the wisdom and insight of people so that he may inform his own creation about the ways which are beneficial or harmful to them.

Twelfth: He should also benefit from the justice that is among the God's creatures, so that he may also offer a portion of it to the evildoers.

Thirteenth: That he might hide from people knowledge of the deeds of the righteous and the evildoers until the Day of Resurrection and Reckoning (*Yaum al-qiyāma wa al-ḥisāb).*

Fourteenth: That he may have the power to make the evildoers and their households rich and mighty and make them look righteous in the people's eyes.

Fifteenth: That he may have the power to make the lies of evildoers accepted [by the people] against [the acts of] the righteous.

Sixteenth: That he may grant to anyone he wishes long life up to three thousand years and make him rich and mighty and give him whatever he desires and also, that he should have the power to show people that it is better to be benevolent toward evildoers than toward the righteous.

Seventeenth: That he should have the power to annihilate the households of the righteous so that no one may know them after three hundred and fifty years.

Eighteenth: That he may have the command over the one who raise the dead (*man yaḥyī al-amwāt*) and let the righteous live and destroy the evildoers until the Day of Resurrection.[440]

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[440] al-Shahristānī, *al-Milal wa al-niḥal*, 1:288–89.

It is said that God accepted these terms, and a pledge of allegiance (*bayʿa*) was made between them in the presence of two trustworthy witnesses chosen from among the angels. This time the two deities gave their own swords to the angels who declared that the one who broke the covenant would be killed by the swords. [441] While al-Shahristānī dismissed this story as a baseless fairy-tale, not befitting the magnificence of almighty God, it nevertheless reveals the psyche of the narrator and readers of such myths and how they perceived the universe and the issue of evil. It appears that, in their worldview, God was not as absolute and omnipotent as the Abrahamic traditions depicted him; he was open to compromise, arbitration, and even concession to the Devil. More significantly, it shows that there were fringe groups within society who firmly held the belief that God and the Devil colluded together and had a mutual understanding about the conduct of affairs in the universe. In other words, Iblīs was assumed to be the co-regent of the cosmos who, through a binding agreement which God was forced to agree to, could dictate his will not only to his own creatures but also to those of God. The agreement seems to confirm this coregency especially in regard to its stipulations about the physical and spiritual affairs of humans. According to this portrayal, Iblīs was not an overtly maleficent being; rather he appears to be a balancing force between the perfect creation of God and the reality of life in the material world.

What is also noteworthy in al-Shahristānī's description is the fact that in this particular tale the Devil is always in search of the light which usually evades him. al-Shahristānī explains that the Majūs—the name used for Zoroastrians —believe that Iblīs, whose abode was in darkness, was always looking for a way to get close to the light. He finally succeeded in mixing the light with malevolence, but God created this world like a tether in order to ensnare and imprison Iblīs. The latter fell into the trap and has ever since been imprisoned in this world, unable to return to his

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[441] al-Shahristānī, *al-Milal wa al-niḥal*, 1:289.

kingdom. The prison made him restless and anxious (*muḍṭarib*), which caused him to afflict people with calamities (*āfāt*), hardships (*miḥan*) and tribulations (*fitan*).[442] The imagery of this tale resembles the allegorical works of Suhravardī in which the protagonist of the tale is often trapped in the material world and becomes anxious, longing for freedom. It appears that in this tale, Iblīs is longing for his previous angelic and even divine status, and in the process of trying to free himself, harms the material world and humans in it.

3.3 Conclusion

As demonstrated in this chapter, Iblīs was portrayed in early Perso-Islamic sources as an enigmatic character. The authors of these sources, who were well-versed in Perso-Islamic myths and legends, portrayed Iblīs not as an evil force, but as a complex and multifaceted figure who inspired awe and respect. None of these sources ever depicted Iblīs as an ugly or heinous demon who resided in darkness and hated God. On the contrary, to Iblīs were attributed many extraordinary qualities and abilities that placed him above all the prophets and angels. Despite his knowledge of the Divine, he was not afraid to stand his ground and to refuse God's command which he deemed unjust. Furthermore, he questioned the wisdom of God and bravely challenged His decision. Exoterically, he was the first not to submit to Divine absolutism. Perhaps it was his anti-authoritarian stand that made Iblīs appealing to some of the authors and mystics of the pre-modern Islamicate world. Yet there must have been some hidden relationship between him and God that allowed him to openly defy God and threaten his creatures while at the same time be given respite and power over humans. This could only have been the result of his high status in the sight of God. This made him

[442] al-Shahristānī, *al-Milal wa al-niḥal*, 1:281.

even more appealing and mysterious in the eyes of medieval Muslim authors. Therefore, it was plausible to portray Iblīs as the possessor of tremendous and often god-like powers, who often appeared as a radiant and mesmerizing sage or ascetic, performed miracles and decided the fate of prophets and entire nations.

In all these legends and stories, Iblīs acted with complete freedom from any chastisement by God and in many cases God even tacitly sanctioned and approved his actions. Iblīs almost always appears as the grand examiner of the faith of people and prophets alike. Every time God wanted to put a person or a prophet to the test, He, directly or indirectly, parleyed that task to Iblīs. Consequently, one may assume that while every archangel is responsible for one or two specific duties, Iblīs was tasked with the most significant duty of all which was to test the faith of every soul. In this way Iblīs was the only one who revealed to God who was worthy of Paradise and who was condemned to life in Hell. At the same time, Iblīs was portrayed as someone who fully acknowledged God's lordship and had a profound knowledge of the universe and the Divine. These descriptions of Iblīs were an endless source of inspiration for the Persian mystics who viewed him as an esoteric Sufi master, worthy of emulation.

Chapter 4
Iblīs in the Works of the Early Persian Mystics

4.1 The Devil and the Rise of the Doubt Movement

The collapse of the Sasanian socio-religious worldview as a result of the Arab conquests, and the subsequent rise of nativist movements ushered in a new and tumultuous era in Mesopotamia and Iran in the 2nd/8th century. While many of these movements were socio-political anti-establishment uprisings against the new Arab elites and their old Iranian counterparts, almost all of them were intrinsically antinomian rebellions against the orthodoxy of the day, be it Islamic or Zoroastrian, which struggled to preserve and enforce its monopoly on the practice of "correct religion" and the "truth." Anyone who challenged the status quo in any way was called a *zindīq*, which roughly translates as "heretic." This term, which was borrowed from the Middle Persian *zandik* which meant "one who interprets the dogma according to the Zand," and in Islamic times was more broadly interpreted to mean "one who holds heretical views," originally referred to someone who held Manichaean beliefs; but as time passed, in Islamic heresiology the term *zindiq* started to denote anyone who doubted and questioned the orthodox Sunni tenets of Islam. This included anyone with Mazdakite, Manichaean, or Zoroastrian tendencies, and anyone who wanted to create a synchronistic Islam by mixing it with any belief that was deemed alien to Islam's core message. As the term *zindīq* gained greater currency, it was applied to anyone who was a freethinker, rationalist, or a doubter, essentially anyone who challenged the orthodox Islamic narrative. The eighth century saw the rise of this so-called *zanādaqa* movement during which a

number of individuals in Mesopotamia and Syria were condemned to death for questioning some of the fundamental tenets of Islam, such as prophethood, the resurrection of the dead, and the wickedness of the Devil.

One of the earliest *zindīqs* was Ibn Abū al-ʿAujāʾ (d. ca. 155/772), who was the chief of the neo-Manicheans and was executed in Basra for his heretical views. He believed that the Light was the creator of goodness and the Darkness was the creator of evil and that these were two ancient, alive, and omnipresent forces whose function was to mix good and evil, which had been separate at the beginning of the creation.[443] He is reported to have asked the sixth Shia Imam, Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq questions such as "Why does God hide himself from us" and "If he is good then why do catastrophes and plagues occur if God is all good?"[444]

The ninth century was the era of the rise of heretical movements among members of the Persian Muslim intelligentsia. In particular, three individuals namely Abū al-Ḥasan b. Isḥāq Ibn al-Rāwandī (d. ca. 298/910), Abū ʿĪsā Muḥammad b. Hārūn al-Warrāq (d. 247/861), and Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Zakariyyā al-Rāzī (d. ca. 313/925) were famous skeptics who challenged the fundamental tenets of Islam. All three were Persian authors who were accused of being either Manichean *zindīqs* or heretics (*mulḥid*). One of the most common topics that all three discussed was prophethood. For instance, an Ismāʿīlī missionary (*dāʿī*) by the name of Abū Ḥātam al-Rāzī (d. ca. 322/934) attempted to answer some of the questions raised by Ibn Zakariyyā al-Rāzī which pertained to the wisdom of God in playing favoritism among his creations. Ibn Zakariyyā al-Rāzī asked: "On what grounds does God single out a certain individual and appoint him as a prophet over the others… The fitting wisdom of the Wise One (*al-Ḥakīm*) and the compassion of the

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[443] al-Maqdisī, *al-Badʾ wa al-tārīkh*, 1:90; al-Bīrūnī, *al-Āthār al-bāqiya*, 67; *Encyclopedia of Islam*, s.v. "Ibn Abi 'l-ʿAwd̲jaʾ"

[444] *Encyclopaedia of Islam*, s.v. "Ibn Abi 'l-ʿAwd̲jaʾ".

Compassionate One (*al-Raḥīm*) is to inspire all of his slaves with the knowledge of what is beneficial or harmful to them. He should not favor one over the other and there should not be any rivalry or disagreement among people which brings them to perdition … and this is much better than choosing an imam over others."[445] This criticism of a perceived favoritism on the part of God was also at the core of Iblīs's refusal to bow down to Adam.

Most of these early doubters were branded by mainstream Sunni authors as heretics or Shia extremists (*ghulāt*). Perhaps the first of these so called *ghulāt* was a Persian originally from Tukhāristān by the name of Bashshār ibn Burd (d. ca. 167/784), who in a poem affirmed Iblīs by declaring fire's superiority to earth:

> The soil is dark, and the fire is luminous
> Th fire that is worshipped, that is true fire.[446]

Another poem attributed to him reads:

> Iblīs is superior to your father Adam
> So, take heed O assembly of the wicked ones
>
> Fire is its essence and Adam is made of clay
> And clay cannot rise above the exaltedness of fire.[447]

There was another Shia gnostic by the name of Muḥammad b. ʿAlī b. Abū ʿAzāqir, more famously known as al-Shalmaghānī (d. 322/934), who was branded a heretic and an extremist (*ghālī*) both by Shia and Sunni jurists and gruesomely executed in Baghdad. He was initially a respected representative of Ḥusayn ibn Rūḥ al-Naubakhtī (d. ca. 326/938), who was the special deputy

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[445] Abū Ḥātim Aḥmad ibn Ḥamdān al-Rāzī, *Aʿlām al-nubuwwa*, ed. Ṣalāh al-Ṣāwī and Ghulāmriżā Aʿvānī (Tehran: Anjuman-i Shāhanshāhī-yi Falsafa-yi Irān, 1356/1977), 3–4.

[446] Abū Manṣūr ʿAbd al-Qāhir b. Ṭāhir b. Muḥammad al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-firaq*, *wa bayan al-firqat al-nājiya minhum*, ed. Muḥammad Uthmān al-Khusht (Cairo: Maktabat Ibn Sīnā, 1409/1988), 57.

[447] Abū Muʿādh Bashshār ibn Burd, *Dīwān shiʿr Bashshār ibn Burd*, ed. al-Sayyid Muḥammad Badr al-Dīn al-ʿAlawī (Beirut: Dār al-Thiqāfa, 1981), 36.

(*nāyʾib khāṣṣ*) of the hidden twelfth Shia Imam, or Mahdī, but due to some political and ideological differences he was discharged and excommunicated as a heretic. Yet despite his excommunication, al-Shalmaghānī still propagated to his followers that he was the hidden agent of the Mahdī. Among his controversial views was that a saint always chose his own opposite as his hidden agent and commanded him to be in opposition to him. This tradition had been followed since time immemorial (*qadīm*) and had not changed.[448] In regard to the concept of al-Qāʾim (He who arises), which was the epithet of the Mahdī, the hidden Imam, al-Shalmaghānī believed this title had nothing to do with the son of the eleventh Shia Imam, whom they believed one day will rise against injustice, but was rather about Iblīs. For when God told the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam, "the angels all prostrated themselves before Adam except Iblīs" (Q 2:34)—the only one who stood up (*qāʾim*) and did not bow. Therefore, in this interpretation, al-Qāʾim was none other than Iblīs, the hidden agent of God chosen for a secret mission.[449]

4.2 **Iblīs and the Early Sufi Ascetics**

Before the establishment of Sufism in the ninth century, there existed a group of early Sufi ascetics (*zuhhād*) who were perhaps the first mystics who had an affinity for Iblīs. However, the accounts of their interactions with Iblīs were often narrated either as a cautionary tale or to prove the veracity of a particular religious doctrine. For instance, one of these early Sufi ascetics was ʿAbd Allāh ibn Mubārak (d. 181/797), who was a Persian from Marv. According to a report mentioned in *Sharḥ al-taʿarruf li-maẕhab ahl al-taṣavvuf* by Ismāʿīl b. Muḥammad Mustamlī Bukhārī (d. 434/1042),

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[448] Abū Jaʿfar Muḥammad ibn al-Ḥasan al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-ghaybat*, ed. ʿĪbād Allāh Ṭihrānī and ʿAlī Aḥmad Nāṣiḥ (Qum: al-Maʿārif al-Islāmiyya, 1425/2004), 406–7.

[449] al-Ṭūsī, *Kitāb al-ghayba*, 407.

ʿAbd Allāh ibn Mubārak described his alleged interaction with Iblīs in the context of validating the religious doctrine of the uncreatedness of the Qurʾan as follows:

> I was taking part in a raid (*ghazv*) when I ended up in a caravanserai. No one was there, and I could not sleep out of fear. When night came, I heard a noise and I sensed something. I looked around and saw a figure in the shape of a baby camel with two eyes on its chest. I was scared. I asked: "Who are you?" He said: "Iblīs." I asked: "Where are you coming from?" He said: "Baghdad." I asked: "What were you doing in Baghdad?" He said: "I was appointing a deputy to turn people into unbelievers." I asked: "Who is he?" He said: "Bishr Marīsī [(d. ca. 219/834)]."[450] I asked: "With what theological problem (*masʾala*) is he turning people into unbelievers?" He said: "By saying the Qurʾan is created." I asked: "What is your opinion?" he said: "I abhor such a thing. The Qurʾan is the uncreated word of God. I know God very well and I know His attributes very well. Although I disobeyed, and I became an unbeliever like this."[451]

This story depicts Iblīs as a scholastic theologian (*mutakallim*) who agrees with the great ascetic mystic Mubārak about the "orthodox" belief that the Qurʾan is the uncreated word of God while at the same time using another theologian to turn people into unbelievers. This indicates that the early Sufi ascetics and exegetes were fully aware of the dual function of Iblīs. While exoterically Iblīs was tasked with leading humanity astray, esoterically he was the perfect example of a gnostic who knew God and his attributes well and gave testimony as to the correct form of belief.

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[450] Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Bishr b. Ghiyāth b. Abū Karīma al-ʿAdawī al-Marīsī (d. ca. 219/834) was a Murjiʾī theologian of the Jahmī branch and a Muʿtazila scholastic theologian (*mutakallim*) and the head of Marisiyya sect who propagated the idea of the createdness of the Qurʾan.

[451] Abū Ibrāhīm Ismāʿīl ibn Muḥammad Mustamalī Bukhārī, *Sharḥ al-taʿarruf li-maẕhab al-taṣavvuf: Nūr al-murīdīn va faẓiḥat al-muddaʿīn*, ed Muḥammad Raushan, (Tehran: Asāṭīr, 1363/1985), 1:352.

Stories about conversations between Iblīs and these Sufi ascetics are also related in other texts. Rashīd al-Dīn Maybudī recounts in his Qurʾan exegesis *Kashf al-asrār va ʿuddat al-abrār* that the Sufi ascetic Dhū al-Nūn Miṣrī (d. ca. 248/862) once saw Iblīs prostrating himself in prayers for forty days in a desert. Dhū al-Nūn told him: "O miserable one! What is all this prayer after [God's] rejection and curse?" Iblīs responded: "If I am dismissed from servitude, God is never to be dismissed from Lordship."[452] These early Sufis often believed that the recognition of God's lordship by Iblīs was due to his mystical knowledge of God. In one of the earliest Persian Sufi manuals titled *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, the author, ʿAlī ibn Uṯmān Hujvīrī (d. ca. 465/1072), expounded on the fact that Iblīs could not be considered an apostate because he had mystical knowledge of God:

> Declaring the apostacy (*takfīr*) of Balʿam and Barṣīṣā and Iblīs is not valid as they all had mystical knowledge (*ʿārif būdand*) of God. As such we have been informed about Iblīs's banishment [when he said to God] "[I swear] By Your exaltedness that I will lead them all astray" (Q 38:82). The reality of saying "By Your exaltedness (*fa-bi-ʿizzatika*)" and the conversation [with God] requires mystical knowledge (*maʿrifat*). As long as the gnostic has mystical knowledge he is secure from the state of being cut off (*qatʿiyat*) [from God's grace] and the state of being cut off only happens through the fading of mystical knowledge.[453]

It was in such a milieu, which promoted theological ambiguity and tolerance toward Iblīs, that the first Sufis appeared to systematically defend his actions.

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[452] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 1:160.

[453] Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī ibn ʿUṯmān Jullābī Hujvīrī Ghaznavī, *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, ed. Muḥammad Ḥusayn Tasbīḥī Rahā (Lahore: Saman, 1374/1995), 394–95.

4.3 Ḥusayn ibn Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj

4.3.1 al-Ḥallāj in the Baghdad Circle of Iblisophile Sufis

The first Sufi who prolifically praised Iblīs was the Persian mystic Ḥusayn ibn Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj, whose few surviving books were written in Arabic. Not only was he the first Sufi who systematically wrote on this topic, but his writings on Iblīs remained, throughout the history of Sufism, among the most unorthodox, elliptical, and paradoxical of all the surviving materials on Iblīs.

al-Ḥallāj was born in 244/ 858 in the village of Ṭūr near Bayżā in Fars, which was the bastion of Zoroastrianism in those days. His grandfather was a Zoroastrian named Maḥmī, who never converted to Islam, and his father was a cotton-wool carder (*ḥallāj*) and a new convert to Islam.[454] He soon traveled to the town of Wāsiṭ in southern Iraq and spent his youth there, where he memorised the Qurʾan by the age of twelve. Louis Massignon and Jawid Mujaddedi's assertion that in the town of Wāsiṭ, the young al-Ḥallāj "lost the ability to speak Persian" is purely speculative.[455] His extended proselytizing travels, some of which lasted for years, to the eastern fringes of the Iranian world suggest that like many of his contemporary Persian intellectuals, he must have been bilingual in Arabic and Persian, as Persian was the lingua franca of the eastern Iranian world.

3rd/9th century Iraq was a milieu in which the greatest Sufis of the time had gathered, and al-Ḥallāj was exposed to the teachings of several of them. It must be noted that most of these Sufis

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[454] Abū Bakr Aḥmad b. ʿAlī b. Thābit Khaṭīb al-Baghdādī, *Tārīkh Madīnat al-Salām; Tārīkh Baghdād*, ed. Bashār ʿAwād Maʿrūf (Beirut: Dār al-Gharb al-Islāmī, 1422/2001), 8:688.

[455] *Encyclopædia Iranica*, s.v. "Ḥallāj, Abu'l-Moḡiṯ Ḥosayn"

who later became al-Ḥallāj's spiritual guides or friends perhaps were themselves Iblisophiles, meaning that they shared an affinity for Iblīs which, as far as the sources tell us, was absent among other Sufis.

al-Ḥallāj's first spiritual master was Abū Muḥammad Sahl ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Tustarī (d. 283/896), a Persian Sufi who at one time was also accused of being a *zindīq*. Perhaps it was al-Tustarī who first introduced al-Ḥallāj to the idea if the mystical dimension of Iblīs. In his seminal hagiography, *Taẕkirat al-auliyāʾ*, Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār Nīshābūrī relates that al-Tustarī himself supposedly had two encounters with Iblīs. The first encounter was in a dream when al-Tustarī asked Iblīs: "What is the most difficult thing for you to bear?" to which Iblīs responded: "The attention of people's hearts toward God."[456] The second encounter was when al-Tustarī saw Iblīs, when he was awake, among a group of people (*qaum*), possibly meaning Sufis. As al-Tustarī recounts:

> I seized him by my resolute psychic power (*bi-himmat*). When that group of people left, I told him: "I will not let you go. Come and give a discourse on the concept of the unity of God (*tauḥīd*)." Iblīs stepped forward and gave such a homily on the concept of *tauḥīd* that if all the gnostics (*ʿārifān*) of the time were present there and then, they would have become perplexed with admiration and astonishment.[457]

In these two encounters which are narrated in sequence, Iblīs appears as a figure who reveals secrets (*asrār*). In the first instance, al-Tustarī's question is an exoteric one; the thing which is most difficult for Iblīs to bear must be the most praiseworthy act in the sight of God and that is the

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[456] ʿAṭṭār, *Taẕkirat al-auliyāʾ*, 1:315.
[457] ʿAṭṭār, *Taẕkirat al-auliyāʾ*, 1:315.

attention of the believer's heart toward Him. This question could have been posed to any Sufi master and the response still would have been the same. But the esoteric interpretation of Iblīs's answer can be construed in light of what some Sufis dubbed Iblīs's jealousy (*ghayrat*). The word *ghayrat* from the Arabic root Gh-Y-R, is related to the word *ghayr* meaning "other." In the Sufi lexicon, the term *ghayrat* is used to describe the mutual jealousy that God and his select saints have toward each other. God demands absolute love and devotion only toward Himself and in return Sufis are careful to see God everywhere and in everything. God often chastises the saint who pays attention to anyone or anything other (*ghayr*) than Himself, and in Sufism this is an unforgivable transgression. In fact, one of the Divine names is *al-Ghayūr* (The Jealous One). Some Sufis went as far as saying that during any length of time that a Sufi fails to remember God, he is an unbeliever (*kāfir*).[458] In al-Tustarī's tale, it is Iblīs who seems to be showing *ghayrat* for God by alluding to the fact that in his eyes, the worst possible thing would be the sight of anyone whose heart is drawn towards God. In other words, in the exact same way that God has *ghayrat* for his lovers, the mystic Iblīs, like a jealous lover, also wants God all to himself and the thought that anyone else might share his Beloved is unbearable. This makes Iblīs *ghayūr*—one who shows *ghayrat* for God. This is a theme that later is used extensively by other Sufis such as Rūmī and ʿAyn al-Qużāt Hamadānī.

The second encounter was a mystical one which occurred when al-Tustarī was fully awake. What enabled al-Tustarī to recognize Iblīs among that group of Sufis (*qaum*)? And why did he have to use his *himmat*, a Sufi technical term which refers to the utmost resolve and aspiration of a Sufi's heart to reach the Divine, to seize Iblīs? This might allude to the possibility that one must

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[458] Bahāʾ al-Dīn Muḥammad ibn Ḥusayn al-ʿĀmilī (Shaykh Bahāʾī), *Kashkūl-i Shaykh Bahāʾī*, ed and trans. ʿAlī Ghażanfarī (Qum: Nīlūfarāna, 1390/2011), 155.

have *himmat* not only to reach God but also to recognize Iblīs and converse with him, and even a great Sufi like al-Tustarī could benefit from Iblīs's wisdom only through *himmat*. The manner in which al-Tustarī describes his interaction with Iblīs suggests that he saw himself as occupying a lower station (*maqām*) than Iblīs when he pleaded with him to give a discourse on *tauḥīd*. The choice of the topic of the discourse is also indicative of the fact that Sufis knew that no one could surpass Iblīs's knowledge about *tauḥīd*. It is no coincidence that *tauḥīd* also became a central theme in al-Ḥallāj's thought.

In the *Kashf al-asrār,* Maybudī recounts another story about the encounter between al-Tustarī and Iblīs in which the former stated:

> On one occasion I saw Iblīs and said to him: "I seek refuge in God from you." Iblīs responded: "If you seek refuge in God from me then I seek refuge in God from God. O Sahl! If you say 'Alas (*faryād*) from Satan!' I say: 'Alas from God!'" I said: "O Iblīs. Why did you not prostrate yourself before Adam?" He said: "O Sahl, leave me be from such nonsensical questions. If you go to the presence of God ask Him for me: 'If you do not want this helpless [one] (*bī-chāra*) [i.e., Iblīs], then why do you make excuses?' O Sahl! I was just at the grave of Adam and I prostrated myself on it a thousand times and [out of reverence] put the dust of his grave on my eyes. At last I heard this [divine] call which said: 'Do not tire yourself. We do not want you.'" He [i.e., Iblīs] then gave me a piece of paper and told me to read it, and as I was busy reading it, he disappeared. On that piece of paper were written the following lines:
>
> If I erred, then who made the destiny erroneous?

> That which you want, O Sahl, is not from me; therefore, leave it. [459]

Here Iblīs is portrayed as the lover of God who admonishes Sahl for chastising him for his destiny. By stating that he takes refuge from God only in God, Iblīs demonstrates the mark of a perfect lover who sees nothing outside of his Beloved's control. His fate, no matter how tragic, was decreed by the same Beloved. Therefore, he tells al-Tustarī that not bowing down before Adam must be viewed as an excuse and not as the real cause of his downfall.

Although Sahl al-Tustarī was a Sufi and the first spiritual master of al-Ḥallāj, it was ʿAmr b. ʿUthmān Makkī (d. ca 296/909) who officially initiated al-Ḥallāj into the Sufi path (*ṭarīqa*) by bestowing upon him the Sufi cloak (*khirqa*) and clipping his mustache.[460] The two, however, broke off their relationship after al-Ḥallāj married the daughter of another Sufi master, Abū Yaʿqūb Aqṭaʿ (d. ca. 266/880) without Makkī's permission.[461] Although the marriage was the final episode which sealed the fate of al-Ḥallāj and Makkī's relationship, there were other incidents which made the master wary of his pupil. In ʿAṭṭār's *Tazkirat al-auliyāʾ*, in the chapter dedicated to Makkī, there are two seemingly unconnected tales which are told in sequence. In the first ʿAṭṭār relates:

> Makkī once saw al-Ḥallāj writing something. He asked him: "What are you writing?" al-Ḥallāj responded: "I am writing something to put on par with the Qurʾan." Makkī anathematized him and expelled him from his presence. The sages say whatever tribulation later happened to Ḥusayn [al-Ḥallāj] was due to that anathematization.[462]

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[459] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 1:160–61.

[460] Louis Massignon, *The Passion of al-Hallāj: Mystic and Martyr of Islam*, trans. Herbert Mason (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1982), 1:72.

[461] Louis Massignon, *Passion of al-Ḥallāj*, 1:65.

[462] ʿAṭṭār, *Tazkirat al-auliyāʾ*, 1:469.

The second incident is about a book called *Ganj-nāma* (The book of treasure), which ʿAṭṭār states was translated by Makkī. According to ʿAṭṭār, Makkī once wrote the translation of the *Ganj-nāma* on a piece of paper and after hiding it under his prayer mat went to perform his ritual ablutions. Before he returned, al-Ḥallāj took the paper. Makkī remembered that he had left the translation and went to fetch it but was told that it had been stolen. Makkī then made an ominous prediction:

> The person who took the *Ganj-nāma* will soon be caught; they will cut off his hands and feet and hang him and they will burn him and scatter his ashes. Does he [only dare to] steal the *Ganj-nāma*? He must [strive to] arrive at the secret (*bi-sirr-i*) of the treasure. What use is there in reading the *Ganj-nāma*?[463]

Although ʿAṭṭār does not identify who took the *Ganj-nāma*, it is not difficult to surmise that the person who took it was none other than al-Ḥallāj, because Makkī's prediction about the fate of the person exactly matched that of al-Ḥallāj.

Besides the account related by ʿAṭṭār, we know nothing about the contents of the *Ganj-nāma* and whether it was an actual book written or translated by Makkī. Perhaps, like so many legends about al-Ḥallāj, it was a fabrication by later authors. However, one of the few references to the esoteric writings of Makkī is found in *Masāʾil wa taʾwilāt ṣūfiyya* by Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī (d. 412/1021) which confirms the story that al-Ḥallāj "took" the *Ganj-nāma*. As al-Sulamī relates:

> ʿAmr ibn ʿUthmān [Makkī] had a fragment [of a book] which contained "special sciences" (*ʿulūm al-khāṣṣa*). It fell into the hands of one of his students who took the

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[463] ʿAṭṭār, *Tazkirat al-auliyāʾ*, 1:469.

> book and ran away. ʿAmr ibn ʿUthmān then said: "His hands and feet will be cut off." It is said that the student was Ḥusayn b. Manṣur al-al-Ḥallāj upon whom all those things had befallen.[464]

While this passage demonstrates that Makkī was in possession of a book on the occult sciences, it is unclear whether it was the *Ganj-nāma*. ʿAṭṭār remains the only author to provide the name and description of the contents of this book. According to ʿAṭṭār, the contents of the *Ganj-nāma* were as follows:

> When the soul descended into the body of Adam, [God] commanded all the angels to prostrate themselves before him. All the angels put their faces on the ground while the soul was infusing with the form of Adam (*jān bi qālib-i Ādam furū shud*). Iblīs said: "I will not prostrate myself and will sacrifice myself (*jān bi-bāzam*) and I will see the secret (*sirr*). It is worth becoming cursed and being called disobedient, wicked, and a hypocrite." He did not prostrate himself and saw the secret of Adam and gained full knowledge of it. Therefore, no one knows the secret of Adam except Iblīs and no one knows the secret of Iblīs except Adam. Because he did not prostrate himself, Iblīs became aware of the secret, and he was busy scrutinizing the secret. Iblīs was that man on whose eye the treasure was placed (*Iblīs ān mard būd ki bar dida-yi ū ganj nihāda būdand*). Because he saw the secret of the treasure [God] said to him: "We have put a treasure in the earth (*khāk*) and the condition for [anyone who sees] the treasure is that only one person is permitted to see it but then he must be beheaded so that he may not

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[464] Abū ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī, *Masāʾil wa taʾwilāt ṣūfiyya* and *Juzʾ min aḥādīth Ismāʿīl b. Nujayd al-Nīsābūrī*, ed. Bilal Orfali and Gerhard Bowering (Beirut: Dār al-Mashriq: 2010), 56.

> reveal it (*ghammāzī*) to others."[465] Iblīs cried out: "In regard to this, give me respite and do not kill me but I know that I am a man [who will keep the secret] of the treasure (*mard-i ganjam*). The treasure has been put on my eye and my eyes will never be safe. [As the saying goes] 'The sword is careless'." God responded: "'You are of those who are given respite' (Q 7:15). We will give you respite but and if We have not destroyed you as a Jinn, we will definitely transfigure (*maskh*) your angelic form and transform you from Angel to a Jinn so that even though We did not destroy you, nonetheless, you will be a known fugitive and a liar and cursed and rejected. No one will know you as an honest person and people will say "'He was of the jinn, so he rebelled against his Lord's command' (Q 18:50). He is a Satan. How can he be truthful? Therefore, he deserves to be accursed and dejected and inscrutable." This was the summary of ʿAmr ibn ʿUs̱mān's *Ganj-nāma*.[466]

From the contents of this episode, it is not clear whether the "translator" of the Ganj-nāma was ʿAṭṭār himself or whether he was simply relating a version of the story that was initially translated by Makkī. Given the fact that the *Taz̲kirat al-auliyāʾ* is the only place in which this story is related, it is hard to trace its origins. Contrary to Massignon's assertion that this tale is "entirely exoteric," one can find many esoteric elements in it.[467] Massignon's misinterpretation perhaps stems from the fact that he assumed Iblīs refused to bow down before Adam because he wanted to "intercept the technique of the divine insufflation of the spirit of life."[468]

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[465] In his commentary to *Taz̲kirat al-auliyāʾ* Shafīʿī Kadkanī states that it was customary for kings to assign only one person to hide their treasure and after the person would perform the task, the king would kill that person so that no one else would not the hiding place of the treasure. See ʿAṭṭār, *Taz̲kirat al-auliyāʾ*, 2:1310.

[466] ʿAṭṭār, *Taz̲kirat al-auliyāʾ*, 1:470.

[467] Massignon, *Passion of al-Ḥallāj*, 1:74.

[468] Massignon, *Passion of al-Ḥallāj*, 1:74.

Yet the underlying message of the story is more esoteric. The key esoteric terms in this tale are the "soul" (*jān*), the "secret" (*sirr*), and the treasure (*ganj*). Iblīs voluntarily chose to sacrifice himself in order to know the secret of Adam. This contradicts Massignon's assertion that Iblīs wanted to learn about the insufflation of the soul into the body, as nowhere in the story is such a claim made. Iblīs was after something much more valuable than learning a technique, and that was the secret of Adam (*sirr-i Ādam*), who was going to be appointed as God's sole vicegerent on earth (*khalīfat Allāh*). Access to the knowledge of this secret was so important for Iblīs that he was willing to sacrifice his soul (*jān bibāzam*) in order to learn it. The term *jān bāzī* not only describes the bravery and determination of Iblīs, but it is often used to describe a jealous lover who is willing to sacrifice his life for the sake of his beloved. This *jān bāzī* was used in contrast to what was said at the beginning of the tale, namely, that Iblīs was willing to lose his own soul after the soul descended into the body of Adam. Iblīs was fully aware of the consequences of his action, and he even predicted his own ominous fate. He knew that he would become cursed and eternally be called disobedient, wicked, and a hypocrite, but it was all worth it. ʿAṭṭār does not give us any details of the secret that Iblīs was willing to sacrifice his soul and reputation for, only that in the end, by refusing to prostrate himself, he was able to see and understand it. ʿAṭṭār states that Iblīs was the only one with knowledge of Adam's secret, but he also tried to put Adam on par with Iblīs by stating that Adam was also the only one who knew the secret of Iblīs—a claim that in the previous chapter was proven hard to ascertain, as it was always the Devil who, both in the Garden and on earth, had the upper hand.

ʿAṭṭār states that this treasure was put "on the eyes" of Iblīs (*bar dīda-yi ū ganj nihāda būdand*) and it was the reason why he became an outcast (*mahjūr*). However, right after God declared that the treasure was put in the ground (*mā ganjī dar khāk nihādīm*), only one person

could see it, and that person would lose his head rather than reveal the secret. Therefore, in this tale, the treasure is found in two places: the first is on Iblīs's eyes and the second is in the ground. One interpretation is that the secret which was seen by Iblīs is the same as the treasure which was first put into the body of Adam (which was made out of *khāk*), but when Iblīs saw it, it was transferred to his eyes, but this transfer made him an outcast. Iblīs pleaded with God to grant him respite, because as he claimed, he was "a man of the treasure" (*man mard-i ganjam*) and his eyes were burdened with it. He knew full well that from then on his eyes would not be in peace (*īn dīda bi salāmat naravad*). God gave him respite and confirmed Iblīs's prediction that from then on, in order to secure the secret of the treasure, he was going to be accused of lying and corruption. This was a tradeoff between God and Iblīs in which the latter accepted to be eternally accused of evil and in return would protect the secret of Adam. The process of this accusation confirms the assertion that Iblīs was innocent of any wrongdoing and God only accused him of being a liar and an evil figure in order to protect the secret of Adam. Some of the terminology used in the tale however, such as *ghammāz* and most importantly, *sirr*, will resurface in works of other Persian mystics writing about Iblīs.

From historical accounts, we are informed that al-Ḥallāj was an outcast among the Sufis of his own time. Most of his masters, including Makkī and Abū al-Qāsim Muḥammad al-Junayd al-Baghdādī (d. 298/910), and even his close Sufi companion Abū Bakr Dulaf al-Shiblī (d. 334/945), either rejected him outright or in the end avoided being associated with him. al-Junayd was a Persian Sufi from the town of Nihāwand who rose to prominence to become the greatest Sufi of all time. The nature of the relationship between al-Junayd and al-Ḥallāj is mired in speculation. What is clear is that while there was an initial encounter between the two, perhaps in the form of an informal master-disciple relationship, in the end the two did not get along very well; and since

al-Junayd was the most respected Sufi master of Baghdad, he could not tolerate the antinomianism of al-Ḥallāj and his followers. That said, there are instances where al-Junayd is also said to be an Iblisophile Sufi himself. In *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, Hujvīrī relates that al-Junayd once said:

> There was a time when I desired to see the cursed Iblīs. One day I was standing at the gate of the mosque. I saw a sage (*pīr*) walking in the distance, and he came toward me. When I saw him, a great trepidation fell upon my heart. When he approached, I asked him: "O sage! who are you that my eyes, being filled with terror, cannot bear the sight of your face, and my heart, on the account of your majesty (*haybat*), cannot bear the thought of you?" He replied: "I am the one whose face you wished to see." I said: "O accursed one, what prevented you from prostrating yourself before Adam?" He responded: "O Junayd, what makes you think that I could prostrate myself to anyone except Him [i.e., God]." al-Junayd then said: "I was stupefied (*mutaḥayyir*) by his response." Then I heard [God's] voice secretly in my heart, telling me, "O Junayd, tell him: "You are lying. If you were my true slave (*ʿabd*) you would not have forsaken My order and rejected it." Iblīs heard God's voice from the secret of my heart and shouted in lamentation saying: "O Junayd. By God, you have set my heart on fire," and disappeared.[469]

This story is also related in ʿAṭṭār's *Taẕkirat al-auliyāʾ*.[470] It appears that the main motive for al-Junayd's wanting to see Iblīs, aside perhaps from curiosity, was to ask him the real reason for his refusal to prostrate himself before Adam. This perhaps indicates that al-Junayd, like so many other

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[469] Hujvīrī, *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, 186.
[470] ʿAṭṭār, *Taẕkirat al-auliyāʾ*, 1:443.

Sufis, was not satisfied with the Qurʾanic or exegetical explanation and desired to hear it from Iblīs himself.

The scene Hujvīrī describes indicates the awe that Iblīs could inspire even in such a seasoned Sufi master as al-Junayd. It is no coincidence that al-Junayd was standing at the gate of a mosque (*masjid*), which means 'the place of prostration'; neither is the question that he asked Iblīs. Iblīs challenged the core of al-Junayd's faith by offering the puzzling counter-question: How dare you ask me why I did not prostrate myself before someone other than God when you yourself are standing in the place of prostration to God. In terms of sagacity and conviction in monotheism, this puts Iblīs above al-Junayd and the great Sufi is baffled by this response. God intervenes, perhaps in part to save al-Junayd from the embarrassment of not having an appropriate retort for Iblīs's clever response, and al-Junayd's heart becomes a medium for God and Iblīs to communicate. Even more surprising is Iblīs's ability to hear God's voice in the inner sanctum of al-Junayd's heart. This passage demonstrates that Iblīs's spiritual insight was believed to be even greater than that of the most prominent Sufis, who were sometimes dubbed "spies of the heart (*javāsīs al-qulūb*)," because if Sufis were able to enter the heart of an individual and find out about his innermost thoughts and desires, Iblīs was able to enter the heart of the greatest Sufi and communicate with God. At the end of the tale, Iblīs assumes the role of the lover who is burned and in turn annihilated by the chastisement of the Beloved.

There is a report of another mystical encounter between Iblīs and al-Junayd which involved al-Junayd's uncle, Abū al-Ḥasan Sarī al-Saqaṭī (d. ca 253/867), who was his Sufi master and initiator into the Sufi path. According to ʿAṭṭār, al-Junayd related:

> One night I woke up from sleep. My secret (*sirr*) [intuition] enjoined me to go to the Shūnīziyya Mosque. I went there and saw a fearsome individual. I was scared. He asked

> me: "O Junayd! Are you afraid of me?" I responded: "Yes." He said: "If you truly knew God then you would not be afraid of anyone but Him." I asked: "Who are you?" He said: "Iblīs." I said: "How can I not be afraid of someone [i.e., you] who does not fear God. It was necessary for me to see you." He said: "That time when you were thinking about me was the [exact] time when you were negligent of God [in your heart]. And you did not know about it. Why did you want to see me?" I said: "I wanted to ask if you ever have influence over Sufis (*fuqarā*)?" He said: "No." I asked: "Why not?" He said: "Because when I want to influence them through the world (*dunyā*) they escape to the hereafter (*ʿuqbā*), and if I want to influence them thorough the hereafter they escape to the Lord (*maulā*), and I have no path in there." I asked: "If you have no influence over them, do you ever see them?" He said: "I do see them. Every time they dance and fell into an ecstatic state (*samāʿ va vajd*) I see from what [pain] they are wailing and lamenting (*mīnāland*)." He said this and disappeared. When I entered the mosque, I saw Sarī [al-Saqaṭī] who had his head on his knees [in contemplation]. He raised his head and told me: "He [i.e., Iblīs], that enemy of God, is lying, as those [Sufis] are too dear [to God] to even be seen by the angel Gabriel, so how can Iblīs ever see them?"[471]

Once again, the setting of this story is outside a mosque, this time one of the famous mosques of Baghdad called *Shūnīziyya* which was a gathering place of Sufis. Iblīs again is the one who shows the great Sufi al-Junayd that his faith is not perfect because he is fearful of someone other than God. Iblīs tells al-Junayd that he sees and knows why Sufis listen to music and wail either in

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[471] ʿAṭṭār, *Tazkirat al-auliyāʾ*, 1:338–39.

lamentation or in ecstasy because he is lamenting from the same pain of separation. In this story, Iblīs is also present at the Sufi musical ceremony (*samāʿ*) and perhaps listening and singing along with the Sufis. ʿAṭṭār portrays Iblīs in these two encounters as a true monotheist who keeps reminding al-Junayd that if one is prostrating oneself before anyone other than God or if one is fearful of anyone but God, then he is still far from becoming the perfect gnostic. In both cases, Iblīs is the admonisher giving invaluable advice to the great Sufi, and although in both stories he is rebutted for being dishonest, the reader can see an upright character in Iblīs and hence sympathize with him.

A Sufi by the name of Abū al-Ḥārith al-Aulāsī (d. 296/909), A contemporary of al-Junayd and al-Ḥallāj also spoke of Iblīs as the master performer of the *samāʿ* ceremonies. The first account comes from al-Qushayrī's *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, in which al-Aulāsī relates:

> "While I was sleeping on the rooftop in the [town of] Aulās, I saw Iblīs in a dream as he was on the rooftops. On his right side was a group of people and on his left side was another group. They were wearing clean clothes. He said to one group (*ṭāʾifa*): 'Recite!' They sang and recited melodically. The elegance of their singing stunned me so much that I [because of being ecstatic state] wanted to throw myself off the roof. He then said [to them]: 'Dance!' and they danced in the most sublime manner. He then told me: "O Abū al-Hārith, I have not found anything better to gain access to you [Sufis] than this."[472]

[472] Abū al-Qāsim ʿAbd al-Karīm b. Hawāzin al-Qushayrī, *al-Risāla al-Qushayriyya*, ed. ʿAbd al-Ḥalīm Maḥmūd and Maḥmūd b. al-Sharīf (Cairo: Dār al-Kutub al-Ḥadītha, 1385/1966), 559.

While this story was interpreted as a condemnation of musical ceremonies, the fact that Iblīs appears in this tale as the master conductor, surrounded not by demons, but by groups of people (*ṭāʾifa*), most likely Sufis, who were performing beautiful music and sublime dancing, indicates that perhaps he was viewed by some Sufis to be one of their own.

The next account is from Hujvīrī's *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, in which the same Abū al-Ḥārith al-Aulāsī relates:

> I was adamant about [attending and performing] *samāʿ*. One night someone came to my [Sufi] lodge (*saumaʿa*) and said: "A group of seekers of God have gathered and they await your presence. If it is no trouble, would you do them the favor to come?" I came out and followed him and it was not long before I reached a group who were in a circle and a sage (*pīr*) was sitting among them. They bestowed upon me tremendous honor and hospitality. Then the *pīr* told me, "If you permit, they will sing a few verses." I responded in agreement. Two persons with beautiful voices started to sing some verses. It was a verse which the poet had recited to them on the topic of separation. They all began to dance ecstatically (*tavājud*) and cried out in joy while making sublime remarks (*ishārathā-yi laṭīf*). I was in awe of their state (*ḥāl*) and their ecstatic moment (*vaqt*) continued until dawn. Then that *pīr* said to me: "O Shaykh! Would you not ask me who I am and who this group (*qaum*) is?" I responded: "Your splendor (*ḥishmat*) prevents me from asking questions." He said: "I am Iblīs and these are my children and there are two benefits for me in this gathering and musical performance:

> one is that I lament the calamitous separation (*fīrāq*) and the bygone glory (*daulat*), and the second is that I lead pious men astray and make them err."[473]

Once again, while outwardly this story is a cautionary tale for Sufis not to be trapped by someone in the guise of the Devil, the Sufi reader cannot help but feel empathy for Iblīs and identify with him. The story is full of the technical terminology of Sufism, and like the Sufis, Iblīs was taking part in a *samāʿ* where no illicit activity of the kind often associated with *samāʿ* ceremonies took place, such as the use of intoxicants or the practice of pederasty. Moreover, the performers were praising God and lamenting the pain of separation, a common theme which is part and parcel of all licit *samāʿ* ceremonies. Iblīs was portrayed as a respectful and majestic Sufi master, who in the end gave some advice to the Sufi protagonist of the tale. This is yet another example that even when the medieval Sufi authors purposely aimed to associate Iblīs with wickedness in their writings, they could not avoid depicting him as an awesome mystical *pīr*.

It seems that Iblīs became something of a companion to al-Junayd. In one tale it is related that a Sufi was going to see al-Junayd when he saw Iblīs running away from him. After approaching al-Junayd, the Sufi saw him chastising someone angrily. The Sufi told al-Junayd: "O Master! I heard that Iblīs has the easiest access to people when they are angry (*dar khashm*). Now you are angry and yet I saw Iblīs running away from you." al-Junayd responded: "Have you not heard and known that we do not become angry on our own account, but our anger is truly the manifestation of God's wrath. Hence Iblīs never runs away from us the way he does when we are angry…. If it were not because God commanded us to say: [the prayer chant] 'I take refuge in God from the expelled Satan (*aʿūẕu bi-Allāh min al-Shayṭān al-rajīm*)', I would never [utter this chant

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[473] Hujvīrī, *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, 590.

and] seek refuge [from Iblīs]."[474] Wrath is one of the chief demons in Zoroastrianism and the lieutenant of Ahriman, and although in Perso-Islamic literature his role is somewhat diminished, as can be seen from this tale, anger is still very much associated with the Devil. Yet one must ask what was Iblīs doing around al-Junayd in the first place and why did al-Junayd see himself as being free from the need to take refuge in God from Satan? Perhaps ʿAṭṭār tried to convey the message that Iblīs was one of the Sufis who comingled with them and that not only were they not afraid of him, but he was the one who ran away from them.

This companionship with Iblīs is reported about other great early Persian Sufis, the most famous of whom was Bāyazīd Basṭāmī. al-Junayd admired him so much that he is reported to have said that: "Bāyazīd among us is like Gabriel [among the angels]."[475] al-Junayd was responsible for translating most of Bāyazīd's sayings from Persian into Arabic.[476] There are accounts that Bāyazīd had visitations from Iblīs. According to ʿAṭṭār, one night all of a sudden Bāyazīd's house became luminous. He said, "[O God,] If it is the Satan then I am more dear [in God's eyes] and with higher resolve (*himmat*) so that he [i.e., Satan] come to me with any desire to beguile me..."[477] ʿAṭṭār does not disclose who this mysterious visitor was but the fact that Bāyazīd assumed that the luminosity in his house may have been the result of a visitation by Satan indicates that the Devil was associated with light and not darkness.

It is also ʿAṭṭār who reports that when the great Sufi of Khurāsān, Aḥmad Khiżrūya Balkhī (d. 854) came to visit Bāyazīd, he told him: "O Shaykh! I saw Iblīs hanged on the gibbet (*dār*) at the entrance to your street." Bāyazīd responded: "Yes! He and I made an agreement (*ʿahd*) that he

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[474] ʿAṭṭār, *Tazkirat al-auliyāʾ*, 1:442.
[475] ʿAṭṭār, *Tazkirat al-auliyāʾ*, 1:161.
[476] *Encyclopædia Iranica*, s.v. "Besṭāmī, Bāyazīd"
[477] ʿAṭṭār, *Tazkirat al-auliyāʾ*, 1:174.

would not tread near the city of Basṭām. Now he tempted someone to commit murder. It is the custom to hang thieves [i.e., Iblīs] in front of a king's [i.e., Bāyazīd] palace."[478] This story is perhaps an allusion to the fact that one of the epithets of Bāyazīd was *sultān al-ʿārifīn* (king of the gnostics) and depicts Iblīs as a criminal who broke his agreement with the king.[479] Obviously, ʿAṭṭār did not mean that Iblīs could have been killed on the gibbet or that his symbolic sentence was a permanent one. Therefore, while perhaps this tale was narrated with the purpose of showing Bāyazīd's spiritual might, the fact that he is said to have made an agreement with Iblīs and that he was able to hang him on the gallows demonstrates that the two had had a number of encounters in the past.

Despite this story, Bāyazīd showed great sympathy for Iblīs. As ʿAṭṭār relates, at the end of his famous ascension through the heavens (*miʿrāj*) to the Throne of God (*ʿarsh*), Bāyazīd says the following about his conversation with God:

> I told [God]: "I will not turn back [from your presence] without asking for something. I will be imprudently bold (*gustākh*) [in my demand]." God said: "ask away." I said: "Have mercy upon all of the people." God said: "Behold!" When I looked, I saw no individual that did not have an intercessor (*shafīʿ*) [on his behalf] and I found God more merciful toward all of them than myself. I became silent. Then I said: "Have mercy upon Iblīs!" God said: "You are indeed imprudently bold! Go! He is from the fire and the fiery one deserves fire. You strive not to get mixed up with that which makes you worthy of fire you cannot bear.[480]

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[478] ʿAṭṭār, *Tazkirat al-auliyāʾ*, 1:173.
[479] ʿAṭṭār, *Tazkirat al-auliyāʾ*, 1:161, 171.
[480] ʿAṭṭār, *Tazkirat al-auliyāʾ*, 1:183.

Bāyazīd clearly knows that God is the most merciful and yet he is asking Him to forgive Iblīs. In his first demand he approaches all the creations from an elitist Sufi standpoint, playing the role of an intercessor who asks for forgiveness for all of humanity, a role that is even greater than that of Prophet Muḥammad, who only intercedes on behalf of Muslims. Yet God demonstrates to Bāyazīd that no one could be more merciful than He is. Bāyazīd then raised his demand, challenging God by asking forgiveness for Iblīs. At this point God's response becomes mystical. Bāyazīd may be given permission to intercede on behalf of all of his fellow humans which in the eyes of God might make him the supreme human, but Iblīs is a fiery being on whose behalf God does not allow anyone to intercede, not because he does not deserve to be forgiven, but perhaps because no one is worthy of being his intercessor. He is a fiery being who after completing his mission will return to fire, which is his origin. God warns Bāyazīd to be careful not to get mixed up with Iblīs's fire, because unlike Iblīs, the Basṭāmī Sufi could not bear it.

In Maybudī's *Kashf al-asrār*, there is an account about Basṭāmī's encounter with Iblīs, similar to that of al-Junayd Baghdādī's. As Maybudī relates, Bāyazīd Basṭāmī said:

> I asked God to show me Iblīs. I found him in the *ḥaram* [i.e., around the Kaʿba] and I made him speak. He spoke wisely. I said to him: "O miserable one! Why did you abandon God's commandment?" Iblīs said: "O Bāyazīd! That was the commandment of the trial, not the commandment of [His] will. If it was the commandment of [His] will I would never abandon it. I said: "O miserable one! It is opposing God which made you this way." Iblīs said: "Stop O Bāyazīd! Opposing means the conflict of two opposites and God has no opposite and agreement means the agreeing of two alike [things] and God is not like anything. Do you presume that if I agreed or opposed God, those actions were really coming from me? They were never mine [to decide]. No one

> has any power over what He destines. Despite all this I have hope of His mercy because He said: 'My mercy encompasses all things' (Q 7:156) and I am a thing." I told him: "On the condition that one follows piety." Iblīs said: "Leave any condition. Because you do not know of the [hidden] outcomes of things. He is the Lord from whom nothing is hidden" and then he disappeared.[481]

Iblīs's response to Bāyazīd is theosophical and like his responses to other great Sufis, puts him in his place for condescendingly questioning his actions. In all of these tales it is Iblīs who is the master and these Sufis are depicted as simple novices who are learning great mystical sciences from Iblīs, such as predestination or knowing the difference between God's trial versus His will.

Another close friend of Junyad, Abū al-Ḥusayn Aḥmad al-Nūrī (d. 295/908), who was also perhaps an Iblisophile Sufi, was a disciple of Junayd's uncle and master Sarī al-Saqatī, and would go on to become one of the most famous Sufis of his time. It is reported that al-Nūrī was once sitting with someone, and they both started crying profusely. When that person departed, al-Nūrī turned to his Sufi companions and asked: "Do you know who he was?" They said: "No" al-Nūrī said: "He was Iblīs. He was recounting his past services [to God] and the legend of his time (*afsāna-yi rūzgār*) and was lamenting from the pain of separation (*dard-i firāq*) and as you saw he was crying. I too cried with him."[482] This commiseration with Iblīs about the pain of separation from the divine Beloved became one of the hallmarks of Iblisophile Sufis who were associated with al-Ḥallāj.

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[481] Maybudī, *Kashf al-asrār*, 1:161.
[482] ʿAṭṭār, *Tazkirat al-auliyāʾ*, 1:488.

Another student of al-Junayd was Abū Bakr al-Wāsiṭī (d. ca. 320/932), who claimed that the true Sufi is the one who battles his own carnal soul (*nafs*) and does not curse the Devil.[483] He spoke on behalf of Iblīs and warned his fellow Sufis of the truth about Iblīs:

> Iblīs says: "They made a mirror of my face and placed it in front of you and they made a mirror of your face and placed it in front of me. I look at you and cry at myself and you look at me and laugh at yourself." And so, learn to tread the path from him [i.e., Iblīs] that he committed himself to the wrong path and embraced what He [i.e., God] had given him which was being the subject of blame (*malāmat*) by the entire world and he proved to be the real [Sufi] man. Ask your heart for a verdict (*fatwā*) to know if both worlds curse you, whether you will run away [from the path] defeated. [If that is the case] do not tread the path.[484]

Here, al-Wāsiṭī emphasizes one of the most distinguished attributes of Iblīs which incidentally is also one of the most highly praised attributes for Sufis, and that is resolve (*himmat*). Iblīs's resolve, despite being on the wrong path, is depicted as the perfect example to follow for those who tread the Sufi path. Furthermore, the Iblīs that al-Wāsiṭī was talking about is the embracer of blame (*malāmat*) and could therefore be categorized as being one of the Malāmatī Sufis, who hid their good deeds and in order to kill their egos, purposely represented themselves as blameworthy in public, while internally continuing to seek divine love.

Among the fellow Sufis of both al-Junayd and al-Ḥallāj was another Iranian Sufi by the name of Abū Bakr al-Shiblī. He was one of the pupils of al-Junayd and at one point one the closest

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[483] ʿAṭṭār, *Taẕkirat al-auliyāʾ*, 1:801.
[484] ʿAṭṭār, *Taẕkirat al-auliyāʾ*, 1:801–2.

confidants of al-Ḥallāj. His antinomian demeanour resembled that of the ancient Greek philosopher Diogenes the Cynic (d. 323 BC). He was one of the Sufis who were dubbed "insane sages" (*al-ʿuqalā al-majjānīn*), that is, sages who often feigned insanity in order to be free of all socio-religious norms and do and say whatever they wanted on the pretext of madness. al-Shiblī Like al-Ḥallāj he had an affinity for Iblīs. He recounts that Iblīs once approached him and gave him some advice, saying: "Do not let the purity of your Sufi moments (*auqāt*) make you haughty because underneath, it hides many spiritual calamities."[485] This is one of many instances in which Iblīs appears as a seasoned Sufi who is aware of the pitfalls of the Sufi path and plays the role of the truthful counselor. In this particular case, he warns al-Shiblī about the cunningness (*makr*) of God and how he should never trust even the purest of spiritual moments.

As ʿAṭṭār relates, when al-Shiblī was on his deathbed, he became agitated and restless and asked for ashes to throw on his own head. When he was asked about the reason for his restlessness, he said:

> I am envious of Iblīs, and the fire of jealousy (*ātash-i ghayrat*) sets my heart ablaze that I am sitting here in yearning and He [i.e., God] gives something of His to another [i.e., Iblīs], namely "And indeed, upon you is My curse until the Day of Judgment" (Q 38:78). I cannot bear to see that 'My curse' (*laʿnatī*) was given by Iblīs. I want that to be mine; even though it is a curse, but it is something from Him. Does that cursed one [i.e., Iblīs] know the value of that? Why was it not bestowed upon the dearest ones

[485] ʿAṭṭār, *Tazkirat al-auliyāʾ*, 1:674.

among the religious community so that they could step on the top of the throne of God (*ʿarsh*)?[486]

Some Sufis explain the first-person possessive letter *yāʾ* (my) which is attached to the noun *laʿnat* (curse) as a great honor that was bestowed upon Iblīs. Yet here, on his deathbed, al-Shiblī goes beyond the mere admiration of such a gift and declares his open jealousy toward Iblīs for receiving the curse because God attached the curse to Himself by saying 'My' and anything that God personally declares to give someone is the most precious gift. If viewed from the Sufi perspective, this also shows that the curse, because it comes from God, is potentially a medium to reach the throne of God and beyond. In the end it was God's decision to bestow it upon none other than Iblīs, which indicates that he was the worthiest of all.

It is possible to trace the chain of Iblisophile Sufis from al-Junayd to his disciples and to the disciples of his disciples. Abū al-ʿAbbās Qaṣṣāb Āmulī (fl. 4th/10th century) was one of the Iblisophile Persian Sufis and a disciple of al-Shiblī. He is reported to have said: "Iblīs is the one slain by God (*kushta-yi khudāvand*). It would not be chivalrous (*javānmardī*) to cast a stone at the one who has been slain by his own God."[487] The Persian phrase *kushta-yi khudāvand-i khʷīsh* could be translated either as "the one who was slain by his own God" or "the one who has been slain for God's sake." This is perhaps a confirmation that Iblīs was viewed by some Sufis as a martyr who was slain by God Himself. Qaṣṣāb Amūlī even goes further in his praise for Iblīs and says: "If I am put in charge on Judgment Day, they shall see what I will do. I will forgive everyone and make Iblīs the first one (*muqadām*) [who is forgiven]. But such a thing will not happen [i.e., I

[486] ʿAṭṭār, *Tazkirat al-auliyāʾ*, 1:678.
[487] ʿAṭṭār, *Tazkirat al-auliyāʾ*, 1:697.

will not put me in charge of Judgment day."[488] This demonstrates that some Sufis believed that Iblīs, more than any other individual, deserved to be forgiven.

4.3.2 Iblīs in the Works of al-Ḥallāj

There are indications that al-Ḥallāj sometimes identified himself with Iblīs. In one instance he referred to himself as "this cursed one (*al-malʿūn*) who has to be killed."[489] The historian Abū ʿAlī Tanūkhī (d. 384/994) relates the following story from one of al-Ḥallāj's disciples:

> We were accompanying him [i.e., al-Ḥallāj] in one of the alleyways of Baghdad when we heard the sound of a flute being beautifully played which made all of us weep emotionally. Some of us asked: "What is this?" al-Ḥallāj told us: "This is [the sound of] the wailing of Iblīs over this world."[490]

On several occasions al-Ḥallāj incited a gathering of people in the market by telling them: "There is no religious duty greater than to shed my blood."[491] This wish was finally granted in March 309/922 in Baghdad, where after a long period of imprisonment and a controversial trial, al-Ḥallāj was condemned to death by dismemberment and then hanged on the gibbet. While he had popular support, his sentence was endorsed by a large group of state officials, religious jurists, theologians, both Shia and Sunni, as well as some Sufis.

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[488] ʿAṭṭār, *Tazkirat al-auliyāʾ*, 1:697.

[489] Louis Massignon and Paul Kraus, ed. and trans., *Akhbâr al-Hallâj: Recueil d'oraisons et d'exhortations du martyr mystique de l'Islam Husayn Ibn Mansur Hallaj* (Paris: Larose, 1936); rev. ed., *Akhbār al-Ḥallāj au munājiyāt al-Ḥallāj* (Damascus: al-Takwīn, 2006), 86. Page references are to the 2006 edition.

[490] Abū ʿAlī al-Muḥassin ibn ʻAlī al-Tanūkhī, *Nishwār al-muḥāḍara wa akhbār al-mudhākara*, ed. ʿAbbūd Shāljī (Beirut: Dār al-Ṣādir, 1995), 1:169.

[491] Massignon and Kraus, *Akhbār al-Ḥallāj*, 86.

It is in his writings that al-Ḥallāj's great reverence for Iblīs becomes evident. His main surviving work, entitled *Ṭawāsīn*, consists of eleven esoteric and often cryptic essays that were collected perhaps by his pupils. The name *Ṭawāsīn* is derived from the plural of two cryptic letters—the so-called isolated letters (*al-hurūf al-muqaṭṭaʿa*) —at the beginning of chapter twenty-seven of the Qurʾan, namely *ṭā* and *sīn*. In the longest of these essays, *Ṭā-sīn al-azal wa al-iltibās*, which roughly translates as "The Ṭā-sīn of pre-eternal time and dissimulation," al-Ḥallāj discusses one of the most controversial exposés about Iblīs. *Ṭā-sīn al-azal* begins with an introduction by an anonymous author who is transcribing the essays, calling al-Ḥallāj "the occult master (*al-sayyid al-gharīb*)." The word *gharīb* itself is a loaded term in Sufism. It denotes not only the peculiarities of a person who does not abide by socio-religious conventions, but also the individual who is physically and spiritually a stranger and does not belong. al-Ḥallāj then opens the chapter by making a bold and shocking declaration:

> The claims (*al-daʿāwī*) of no one are true save for those made by Iblīs and Aḥmad [i.e., the Prophet Muḥammad]; except Iblīs fell from the eye (*saqaṭa ʿan al-ʿayn*) and Aḥmad had unveiled to him from the eye of the eye (*wa Aḥmad kashafa lahu ʿayn al-ʿayn*). Iblīs was told "Prostrate yourself" and Aḥmad was told to "Look." This [i.e., Iblīs] did not prostrate himself and Aḥmad did not look and did not turn left and right. "The eyes did not swerve, nor did it transgress" (Q 53:17). Iblīs made a claim but he did not return to its transformative power (*ḥaulahu*). Aḥmad made a claim but he returned from its

> transformative power. As he said [to God] "Yours are the transformation and Yours are the roots" and "O changer of hearts" and "I cannot count Your praises."[492]

This cryptic beginning puts Iblīs and Muḥammad on par and above all of creation. According to Awn the juxtaposition of these two seemingly opposites figures, namely Muḥammad and Iblīs, jolt the readers mind into contemplating the divine manifestation of these two antithetical figures.[493] They both had a direct vision of the Divine, and that is why they were the only ones whose claim to that vision was true. Iblīs had the vision when he was told to prostrate himself before Adam. As it was discussed in the *Ganj-nāma*, which was supposedly taken by al-Ḥallāj, Iblīs refused to prostrate himself before Adam in order to have a vision of the *sirr*. But here al-Ḥallāj suggests that by refusing to prostrate himself, Iblīs acquired something far greater, and that was the vision of the Divine. The term *ʿayn* used in this section has multiple interpretations, including eye, source, spring and essence, all of which point to the ultimate reality of God which is vouchsafed through mystical vision (*mushāhida*). For Muḥammad that vision was acquired on his Heavenly Ascension (*miʿrāj*), as the Qurʾanic reference "The eyes did not swerve or was it overbearing" in this section implies. ʿAyn al-Qużāt Hamadānī considered that this Qurʾanic verse could equally apply to Iblīs. In an esoteric interpretation, he envisioned that when all the angels were prostrating themselves before Adam, Iblīs was so taken by God that he was standing upright and his gaze was fixed on none other than the essence of God, and hence "The eyes did not swerve nor did it transgress." [494]

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[492] Abū al-Mughīth Ḥusayn ibn Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj al-Bayḍāwī. *Kitâb al-Ṭawâsîn*, ed and trans. Louis Massignon (Paris: Paul Geuthner, 1913), 41–42.

[493] Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 123.

[494] ʿAyn-al-Qużāt Abū al-Maʿālī ʿAbd Allāh b. Muḥammad Miyānjī Hamadānī, *Nāmahā-yi ʿAyn al-Qużāt-i Hamadānī*, ed. ʿAlī Naqī Munzavī and ʿAfīf ʿUsayrān (Tehran: Manūchihrī and Zavvar, 1362/1984), 1:96.

It is noteworthy that when comparing Iblīs and Aḥmad which is one of the epithets of Muḥammad, al-Ḥallāj always mentions the name of Iblīs first. Also, the fact that he uses the name Aḥmad (Praised One), rather than the name Muḥammad was perhaps done for two reasons: the first was to demonstrate that the greatness of the positions of Aḥmad and Iblīs in regard to their mystical visions had nothing to do with their epithets, which are respectively the "Praised One" and the "Cursed One." Secondly, since they are both the first and foremost in possessing the divine vision, it is only fitting that both of their names should start with the first Arabic letter, *alif*, which not coincidently is also the first letter in Allāh. For al-Ḥallāj, who believed in the occult power of letters, the choice was fitting.

Yet the results of those mystical visions turned out to be different for Muḥammad and Iblīs. While the vision of the *ʿayn* caused Iblīs to fall, God unveiled (*kashf*) for Muḥammad many secrets from the essence of the *ʿayn*. Iblīs on the other hand did not need any unveiling as he could see and speak with God directly and was privy to all of the divine secrets. As al-Ḥallāj explains, both Iblīs and Muḥammad were transformed by their claims. While al-Ḥallāj does not divulge what the nature of this claim was, one interpretation, taken from the context, can be that they both claimed to have the vision of the essence of the Truth (*ʿayn al-ḥaqq*) which according to al-Ḥallāj was their rightful prerogative. Iblīs no longer needed to return to the transformative power of his claim as it appears, as he was already perfected. While Muḥammad, who felt that he was still imperfect and incapable of praising God, returned to it and prayed to God to grant him more. As Awn rightly noted al-Ḥallāj does not ascribe any moral significance to the reactions of Muḥammad and Iblīs.[495]

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[495] Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 124.

The term *al-daʿāwī* used in the first section could be also interpreted as proselytization. In this interpretation the first sentence of the section can be read as: "No one has the right to do the acts of proselytization save for Iblīs and Aḥmad." As we shall see, it is ʿAyn al-Qużāt Hamadānī who will expound on this concept of proselytization by Iblīs and Muḥammad. In the second section, al-Ḥallāj states:

> There was no believer in the unity [of God] (*muwaḥḥid*) like Iblīs in the heavens. When the *ʿayn* was altered for Iblīs, he migrated (*hajara*) from the glimpses (*al-laḥāẓ*) into the secret (*al-sirr*) and worshipped the Deity stripped of all else (*al-tajrīd*). He was cursed [by God] when he reached the stage of [divine] individuation (*al-tafrīd*) but he was summoned back when he asked for more.[496] He was told [by God]: "Prostrate yourself [before Adam]." He said: "[To] no other (*lā ghayr*)." He was told [by God]: "My curse will be upon you" (Q 38:78). He said: "[To] no other."[497]

This statement makes Iblīs the chief of all unitarian monotheists and by extension puts him ahead of all the heavenly beings including the archangel Gabriel. When the true essence was shown to Iblīs, he moved beyond being a mere observer of the divine essence and was enveloped in the secret divine essence. It was only then that he could truly worship God in the purest form by being free of everything else, even the vision of the *ʿayn* itself. In Sufism, the term *tajrīd* refers to a stage in which the mystic is stripped of all material and spiritual veils which hinder true mystical knowledge of God. Hence, the ultimate act of worship is only possible after becoming a complete gnostic and that is not possible before the act of *tajrīd*, which strips away all hindrances in the path

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[496] al-Ḥallāj, *al-Ṭawāsīn*, 42–43.
[497] al-Ḥallāj, *al-Ṭawāsīn*, 43.

to recognizing the essence of God. The Sufi who goes through the process of *tajrīd* becomes spiritually single (*mujarrad*) and only such a *mujarrad* Sufi can witness God's individuation (*tafrīd*).

The term *tafrīd* refers to the act of individuating God (*ifrād*) from all else. In other words, *tafrīd* is to witness God separated from all of His manifestations. This term is perhaps key in understanding Hallajian dogma. It is said that al-Ḥallāj's last words on the gibbet reflected this central idea. Before he died on the gibbet, he is rumoured to have said: "It is incumbent upon the ecstatic one [i.e., the Sufi] that he should individuate the One *(ḥasb al-wājid ifrād al-wāḥid lahu*)."[498] This means that Sufis must strive to attain such a union with God that all existence (which are the manifestations of God) including themselves becomes annihilated in the One. According to al-Ḥallāj, this was only the first step toward perfecting the belief in God's unity (*tauḥīd*) because complete *tauḥīd* comes only after annihilation of the *tafrīd*, and hence it is incumbent upon the Sufi not only to strive to reach the *tafrīd*, but more importantly to go beyond it. Otherwise his belief in *tauḥīd* will remain incomplete.[499]

To al-Ḥallāj, Iblīs was such a perfect mystic. He witnessed and worshiped God in the state of complete singlehood, detached from all other manifestations of God. He was cursed not when he refused to prostrate himself before Adam but when he saw God in the pure state of *tafrīd* and could no longer look at the manifestation of God in any other form, including Adam. Hence, the curse and the downfall for him was yet another mystical stage in his path toward complete annihilation of the self. That is why in this section al-Ḥallāj states that Iblīs never ceased to ask for

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[498] Massignon and Kraus, *Akhbār al-Hallāj*, 40.
[499] Hujvīrī, *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, 406.

more even after reaching the stage of *tafrīd* and being cursed, and because of that, he passed the test and was summoned back.

The conversation described by al-Ḥallāj between God and Iblīs attests to the latter's absolute belief in the concept of *tauḥīd*. When God commanded him to prostrate himself before Adam, his response was more profound than the interpretation that modern scholars often suggest, which is "I will prostrate myself to none other than You." As al-Ḥallāj's choice of words suggest, Iblīs was so immersed in the triangle of *tajrīd*, *tafrīd* and *tauḥīd* that he could not see or recognize anything but God. He was in a complete state of *fanā* ("annihilation"). This explains his response to God's command: "No other (*lā ghayr*)." He did not even use the proposition "'*to*' no other" as many translators often mistakenly assume; he simply acknowledged that there was no existence other than God. This is one of the significant points which was overlooked by Awn.[500] The Iblīs that al-Ḥallāj portrays was so immensely subsumed and annihilated in the transcendent unity of God that for him nothing else existed at that moment. For al-Ḥallāj, this was the ultimate testimony to the unity of God. He felt nothing but God as he was bewildered by His essence. He was not concerned for himself and certainly did not care about Adam. That is why his response to the threat of being cursed by God was still the same: "No other (*lā ghayr*)." For Iblīs, God was the ultimate and only Truth beside which nothing else existed.

al-Ḥallāj then cites a poem that was recited by Iblīs to God, and it is followed by a conversation and then by other verses:

> My rejection is sanctification (*taqdīs*) of You
> My intellect is bewildered in You.
>
> Who is Adam but You?
> Then who is Iblīs in the midst [of all this]?

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[500] Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 124.

For me there is no pathway to any other but You
and I am a downtrodden lover.

He [i.e., Iblīs] was told [by God]: "You have become haughty!" Iblīs replied, "If I spend only a moment with You, that would warrant me to be haughty and domineering. I am the one who had mystical knowledge of You (*ʿarraftuka*) in pre-eternity (*azal*). 'I am better than him (i.e., Adam)' (Q 7:11) because of my precedence in [Your] service. And in both worlds, there is no one with more mystical knowledge of You than I. I have a will (*irāda*) in You and You have a will in me. Your will in me is from the old times (*sābiq*) and my will in You is from the old times. Whether I prostrated myself before anyone other than You or did not prostrate myself, it is inevitable for me to return to the origin, "Because you have created me from fire" (Q 7:11). Fire returns to fire. To you belong predestination (*al-taqdīr*) and choice (*al-ikhtiyār*).

There is no distance for me after distancing of You
When I gained certitude that nearness (*al-qurb*) and farness (*al-buʿd*) are the same.

Even if I am abandoned, abandonment is my companion
How true can be the abandonment when the love is one?

To You is the praise for bringing about pure sincerity
In the virtuous slave who did not prostrate himself before anyone but You.[501]

In the first poem, Iblīs not only explains the mystery of disobedience but more importantly, stresses the central dogma of al-Ḥallāj which is reaching the purest form of *tauḥīd* through *tafrīd*. Iblīs tells God that his rejection of God's commands was indeed nothing but the sanctification of Him and a testament to his unwavering belief that only He was worthy of his prostration. By his rejection,

[501] al-Ḥallāj, *al-Ṭawāsīn*, 43–44.

Iblīs refused to bow down to any form of manifestation of God. Specifically, in the case of prostrating himself before the form of Adam, which Iblīs viewed as the false temple of God's manifestation, a *vestigia Dei* as Awn suggested, that would be tantamount to idol-worship.[502] Therefore, in refusing God's order, he sanctified (*taqdīs*) the unadulterated unity of God. At that moment, his intellect became bewildered and even annihilated in the glory of God's essence. He realized that Adam was only an ephemeral manifestation of God, and more importantly, even he himself did not have any independent existence. This realization was at the core of al-Ḥallāj's famous and paradoxical utterance "I am the Truth (*anā al-ḥaqq*)" in which the person's somatic self is completely annihilated in the one ultimate Reality and he sees or senses nothing else but God. Iblīs, who according to al-Ḥallāj reached the stages of *tajrīd* and *tafrīd*, became the *muwwaḥid*, or monotheist, par excellence.

The first poem ends when Iblīs declares that for him there is only one pathway and that leads to God. Hence, no other (*ghayr*) exists, and he calls himself a downtrodden lover (*muḥibbun dhalīl*). This jealousy (*ghayrat*) that no one other than the Beloved existed for Iblīs also became al-Ḥallāj's mark of the true lover even if it meant sacrificing oneself. Iblīs then speaks to God about the reason for his haughtiness which stems from the fact that at the moment he became one with God, he also became one with his divine attributes, such as pride (*kibr*) and domineering (*jabr*). He then stresses the fact that not only was he a gnostic (*ʿārif*) from pre-eternity (*azal*), but also that in the entire universe there was no one with more mystical knowledge of God than him and that is why he said: "I am better than him" (Q 7:11). He then speaks of the mutual will (*irādat*) that he and God have for each other. While the term *irādat* generally means "will," it also denotes a sense of close affinity and respect toward someone. Iblīs indicates that this affinity or will is an

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[502] Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 126.

ancient one and that he served God from time immemorial. This stress on the old affinity and servitude flies in the face of many exegeses and some theological interpretations that even though Iblīs served God for many years, he was unwanted since the beginning and this fact was concealed until he refused God's command. Speaking on behalf of Iblīs, al-Ḥallāj reminds the Sufis that the older the companionship between the Beloved and His lover, the more unbreakable the bond.

In this account, Iblīs is fully aware that both predetermined destiny (*al-taqdīr*) and choice (*al-ikhtiyār*) belong to God. He also acknowledges the well-known Islamic maxim "Everything will return to its origin (*kullu shayʿ yarjiʿu ilā aṣlihi*)," and hence his fiery self must one day return to fire. Therefore, regardless of whether he prostrated himself before anyone except God or not, he would eventually return to his origin. What he would lose, however, is that great conviction and the authenticity of his claim to *tafrīd* and *tauḥīd*. Iblīs ends his conversation with God with another poem in which he states that the concept of farness (*buʿd*) from God does not apply to him any longer because he has reached certitude (*yaqīn*) that both farness and nearness (*qurb*) are one (*wāḥid*) and the same, because they lose their meaning in the Oneness of God. These two great mystical concepts are often the subject of contemplation among Sufis. There are some Sufis who find nearness to God overwhelming and bewildering, while others gain their spiritual epiphanies through nearness and see farness as a divine punishment. Iblīs, on the other hand, moved beyond these two concepts as he saw the One and hence the spiritual experience of both of these states were equal to him. Because his abandonment was also from the One, he did not suffer from exile. He finally praised God for letting him show the sincerity of his claim to *tauḥīd* through his refusal to prostrate himself before Adam.

In the next passage, al-Ḥallāj begins a new topic—the mystical encounter between Moses and Iblīs:

> Moses and Iblīs met on a precipice of Mount Sinai (*al-Ṭūr*) and he [i.e., Moses] asked him: "O Iblīs! What stopped you from prostrating yourself [before Adam]?" Iblīs said: "What stopped me was my claim to [worship] only one deity (*maʿbūd*). If I prostrated myself before him, I would be [someone] like you. You were told [by God] only once: "Look at the mountain (*unẓur ilā al-jabal*)" (Q 7:143) and you looked, and I was told a thousand times "Prostrate yourself" and I did not, because my claim is what defines me. He [i.e., Moses] said: "You abandoned the command!" Iblīs said: "That was a test, not a command." Moses said: "That is why your [angelic] form was changed." Iblīs said: "O Moses! That was a cover (*talbīs*) and this is Iblīs. The state (*al-ḥāl*) is not dependable and it alters, but the mystical knowledge (*maʿrifat*) is as genuine as it has ever been, and it does not alter even if the person has changed." Moses asked: "Do you remember Him now?" He [i.e., Iblīs] said: "O Moses! The remembrance does not remember. I am the remembered one, and He is the remembered one (*madhkūr*). His remembrance (*dhikr*) is my remembrance, and my remembrance is His remembrance. Can the two who remember be anything but together? Now my service is purest and my moment (*waqt*) clearest, my remembrance [of Him] most manifest, because I used to serve him for the sake of my own lot and now I serve him for His lot."[503]

As it was mentioned in Chapter 3, there were several incidents in which Moses had an encounter with Iblīs and although those tales were intriguing, this encounter envisioned by al-Ḥallāj is by far the most mystical one. The meeting is set up on Mount Sinai where Moses had his first encounter with God and thereafter repeatedly visited it to communicate with God and receive His revelation.

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[503] Ḥallāj, *al-Ṭawāsīn*, 45–46.

al-Ḥallāj perhaps is suggesting that by Moses's meeting Iblīs instead of God on Mount Sinai, Iblīs could also be considered a source of revelation. As it happens, this time Iblīs is the one who chastises Moses, not only for asking the wrong questions but also for committing a grave error in judgment. He tells Moses the reason that he did not prostrate himself before Adam was his claim to worship only the single deity (*al-maʿbūd al-wāḥid*). Iblīs then refers to the Qurʾanic story in which Moses asked God: "My Lord, show me [Yourself] that I may look at You" (Q 7:143). God said: "You will not see Me, but look at the mountain; if it should remain in place, then you will see Me." Then God manifested Himself to the mountain, the mountain crumbled to dust, and Moses fell down unconscious at the sight of God's majestic manifestation. Iblīs cleverly compares God's command to prostrate himself before Adam to God's command to Moses to look at the mountain. By this comparison Iblīs concludes that in both cases the command was to pay attention only to God's manifestation: in Iblīs's case to the form of Adam, and in Moses's case to the mountain. While Moses was asked only once to look, Iblīs was asked a thousand time to prostrate himself. Iblīs, who reached the stage of *tafrīd*, refused to accept this abasement of God and did not prostrate himself to His manifestation in the form of Adam. Iblīs here suggests that not only was Moses not worthy or capable of seeing God, but he degraded his belief in *tauḥīd* when he accepted to look at God's manifestation in the form of the mountain. To Iblīs that was tantamount to polytheism (*shirk*), and it justified his derision toward Moses.

Moses, who perhaps felt embarrassed, mocked Iblīs because he became deformed on account of abandoning God's command. Iblīs's response once more put Moses in his place. He told Moses that what God said was not a command, but a test which he believed he passed perfectly. Iblīs stipulated that his external deformity was only a temporary disguise (*talbīs*) which was related to the changeable nature of the state (*ḥāl*), whereas the mystical knowledge of God

which he attained since pre-eternity could never change. The *ḥāl* refers to the mystical state of Sufis in which they experience various degrees of proximity to God. It comes and goes, and most Sufis believe that it is an involuntary and transitory state bestowed upon them by God as a favor. Iblīs here states that mystical knowledge (*maʿrifat*) is far greater and more genuine than *ḥāl* and suggests that his external deformity is nothing but a transient charade.

Iblīs reminded Moses that his annihilation (*fanā*) in God was so deep that he could no longer remember God, because in order to remember someone, one had have an entity separate from the remembered person. Iblīs was the Divine and the Divine was him, therefore remembering one was the same as remembering the other. This also alludes to the fact that all Iblīs did now was God's work and vice versa. Iblīs then claimed that as a result of passing the ordeal, his relationship with God improved significantly, his service to God became purer, and his mystical moments (*waqt*) became freer. This was due to the fact that before his ordeal, he was serving God only for his own sake, but after the ordeal, he served God purely for God's sake. al-Ḥallāj then continues to explain, in Iblīs's words, the attributes of the stages that Iblīs went through and the qualities that he gained in the process of his ordeal:

> I removed greed (*ṭamaʿ)* from [any] prohibition and rejection and harm and advantage [coming from God]. He [i.e., God] individuated me (*afradanī*), caused me to become ecstatic (*aujadanī*), and made me bewildered when he banished me, so that I might not mingle with the sincere ones. He kept me apart from the others (*al-aghyār*) because of my jealousy (*ghayrat*). He othered me (*ghayyaranī*) because of my perplexity (*ḥayratī*), perplexed me because of my expatriation (*ghurbatī*), expatriated me because of my service, and forbade me (*ḥarramanī*) because of my companionship (*ṣuhbatī*), consecrated me (*aḥramanī*) because of my migration (*hijratī*), and made me emigrate

> because of my unveiling (*mukāshafatī)* and unveiled for me because of my union (*waṣlatī)*, and united me [with Himself] because of my separation, and cut me off in order to prevent me from my own desires (*maniyyatī*).[504]

This cryptic section appears to describe Iblīs's spiritual state after his ordeal. He begins by saying that because now his service was purely done for the sake of God, his actions were no longer calculated based on God's acceptance or rejection, or out of benefit or harm for himself, because God individuated and separated him from all creation and caused him to become ecstatic. The play on the terms *fard* ("individual") and *wajd* ("ecstasy") once more reminds the reader of al-Ḥallāj's last word on the gallows: "It is incumbent upon the ecstatic one that he should individuate the One (*ḥasb al-wājid ifrād al-wāḥid lahu*)." This time however, both ecstasy (*wajd*) and individuation (*ifrād*) have been bestowed upon Iblīs by God which resulted not only in his perplexity (*ḥayrat*) but also in separating him from rest of the creation, even the most sincere ones (*mukhliṣin*). This separation stemmed from the mutual jealousy (*ghayrat*) that Iblīs and God had for one another through which they both tried to prevent anyone from knowing the truth about the other one.

Iblīs then enumerates a number of mystical stages, each predicated upon the former. By describing these stages, Iblīs expounds upon the mysteries of his banishment. Most of these stages demonstrate the great affection and love that God had for him. God separated Iblīs and othered him from the rest of creation because of their mutual jealousy that in turn created the perplexity for Iblīs which was the result of his exile (*ghurbat*). Iblīs viewed this expatriation positively and considered it recompense for his services to God. It was through this expatriation that he was perfected spiritually and that in turn resulted in him being the exiled immigrant (*li-hijratī*). The

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[504] al-Ḥallāj, *al-Ṭawāsīn*, 47–48.

term immigration (*hijrat*) is often associated with the flight of Prophet Muḥammad from Mecca to Medina and in the Qurʾan it is taken to be a spiritual journey from evil to good which will perfect a person. Iblīs believed that the next stage for him after serving God was migration from his own self. In this spiritual journey, his sole companionship (*ṣuḥbatī*) was supposed to be with God, therefore all of the creation was forbidden to become his companion. This *hijrat* also made him the subject of consecration (*ḥarramanī*). Like *hijrat*, the word *ḥarrāma* while generally meaning to forbid, it is also rooted in the Islamic practice of becoming a pilgrim to Mecca which is marked by wearing a white garment (*iḥrām*). In the process of his *hijrat*, Iblīs became the consecrated pilgrim (*muḥrim*), not to visit the house of God (*Kaʿba*) in Mecca but to visit God himself. Therefore, in the same way that for the pilgrims to Mecca, who are in the state of *iḥrām,* or consecration, certain acts are forbidden, for Iblīs, all except God became forbidden (*aḥramanī*) so that he might become an immigrant toward Him (*li-hijratī*). It was through this spiritual pilgrimage that the unveiling (*mukāshifa*) took place for him. The term, *kashf*, refers to a stage where the divine secrets are manifested to the Sufi. It is when the veils (*ḥijāb*) of physical and spiritual ignorance are lifted. For Iblīs, this unveiling was not of a divine secret but of God Himself which led to the union (*waṣlatī*) with Him. In the end, Iblīs declared that the union would not have been possible if he had not been cut off (*qaṭaʿaṭī*) not from God but from his own self and desires (*maniyyatī*).

In the next passage, Iblīs confirms that he did not err:

> I did not err in prudence (*al-tadbīr*) in [recognizing] His reality, or reject destiny (*al-taqdīr*), nor did I care much for the alteration of [my] image (*al-taṣwīr*). Such is my predestined fate. If He torments me by His fire until eternity and beyond, I will not prostrate myself before anyone [except Him]. I will not disgrace myself for an effigy

> (*shakhṣ*) and body (*jasad*). I do not acknowledge any antithesis or offspring [for God]. My claim is the claim of the truthful ones and in the love [of God] I am among the truthful ones.[505]

This section does not depict Iblīs as a wily and rash figure who in the heat of events makes a decision and then regrets his actions, an image that is often associated with him. His decision was calculated and based on foresight. He was also well aware of his predestined fate and was not bothered by being deformed, as he considered it only transitory. Iblīs once more declared his aversion to humbling himself before any physical form and he refused to even acknowledge the existence of anything antithetical to God or begotten from Him. Therefore, he maintained that his claim to *tauḥīd* and *tafrīd* remained true because this was the mark of the sincere lover of God. al-Ḥallāj continues his essay by claiming that Iblīs is a proselytizer (*dāʿī*):

> Regarding the state of affairs of ʿAzāzīl there are [different] opinions. One is that he was a proselytizer (*dāʿī*) in heaven and on earth. In heaven he summoned the angels, showing them virtues, and on earth he summons mankind, showing them wickedness. Things are known through their opposites. A delicate silken garment is woven on top of the [rough] black goat-hair cloak. The King [i.e., God] presents the virtues and tells the righteous: "If you act upon them you will be recompensed," and Iblīs presents the vices and says: "If you act upon them you will be recompensed in an enigmatic way (*marmūzan*)." Whoever does not know vice, does not know virtue.[506]

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[505] al-Ḥallāj, *al-Ṭawāsīn*, 48–49.
[506] al-Ḥallāj, *al-Ṭawāsīn*, 49.

This is the first time al-Ḥallāj refers to Iblīs as ʿAzāzīl, confirming that regardless of his status, he remains the proselytizer. While in heaven he was tasked with the demonstration of virtues to the angels; on earth he similarly demonstrates to humans, but only showing them the vices. The key point in this section is al-Ḥallāj's comparison between good and evil and that one cannot be known or even exist without the other. Light does not exist without darkness and virtue does not exist without wickedness. Therefore, while God promises the righteous recompense for their virtues, Iblīs promises the same thing for the wicked; but since his task is the opposite of God's, his promise of "recompense" remains, like himself, an enigma.

Perhaps the most striking passage of *Ṭāsīn al-azal* is the one in which al-Ḥallāj speaks of his mystical encounters with Iblīs and Pharaoh:

> I debated with Iblīs and Pharaoh concerning the [concept] of manliness/chivalry (*futuwwa*). Iblīs said: 'If I prostrated myself [before Adam] I would have lost the title of *futuwwa*.' Pharaoh said: 'If I believed in his messenger [i.e., Moses] I would fall from the rank of *futuwwa*.' I [i.e., al-Ḥallāj] said: 'If I backed down from my own claim and words, I would fall from the seat of *futuwwa*.' Iblīs said: 'I am better than him' (Q 7:11) while he saw no one other than Him [i.e., God]. Pharaoh said: 'I do not know that you have any god but me' (Q 28:38) while he did know anyone among his subjects who could distinguish between the Truth (*al-ḥaqq*) and Creation (*al-khalq*).
>
> I [i.e., al-Ḥallāj] said: 'If you do not know Him then know His signs (*al-āthār*). I am that sign (*al-athar*). I am the Truth (*anā al-ḥaqq*). Because I never ceased to be true in being the Truth. Therefore, my companions and my masters (*ṣāḥibī wa ustādhī*) are Iblīs and Pharaoh. Iblīs was threatened with fire and did not back down from his claim, and Pharaoh was drowned in the sea and did not back down from his claim and

> did not accept any intermediary. Instead he said: 'I believe that there is no god but He in whom the Israelites believe' (Q 10:90). Do you not see that God admonished Gabriel about him and said to him: 'Why have you filled his mouth with sand?' For this reason if I were killed or crucified or my hands and feet were cut off, still I would not back down from my claim.'[507]

In a mystical context, *futuwwa* refers to spiritual chivalry and is a tenet of many Sufi orders. It refers to a wide-encompassing ethos which includes selflessly helping others, being kind to all, and standing up for justice. One often overlooked feature of *futuwwa* is also being faithful to one's claim, or simply put, practicing what one preaches. The true practitioner of *futuwwa* would gladly sacrifice his life for what he believed or claimed. In this passage, al-Ḥallāj portrays himself in a debate with Iblīs and Pharaoh, both of whom are portrayed in an extremely negative light in Islam, and he finds them both to be the epitome of spiritual chivalry. Iblīs tells al-Ḥallāj that if he prostrated himself before Adam, he would lose the title of *futuwwa*. This is clearly in reference to his claim of being a steadfast *muwaḥḥid*, and by prostrating himself before Adam he would have been abandoning his own claim, which was forbidden in the code of chivalry. The same is true for Pharaoh, who according to al-Ḥallāj was in a state similar to that of Iblīs when he rejected the intermediacy of Moses, who came between him and God. In the eyes of al-Ḥallāj, both were champions of *futuwwa* because they stayed true to their claims until the end. For al-Ḥallāj, they both used the word "I" and viewed their selfhood as an extension of the ultimate Truth, while Adam and Moses represented the otherness (*ghayr*) which they refused to acknowledge as a substitute for the Truth.

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[507] al-Ḥallāj, *al-Ṭawāsīn*, 50–52.

al-Ḥallāj called none of the Sufis of his age as his companion (*ṣāḥibī*) or master (*ustādhī*), a rank which was only reserved for Iblīs and Pharaoh. In these Qurʾanic figures, al-Ḥallāj found his heroes with whom he shared a sense of chivalrous brotherhood, a feeling that he did not share even with the most prominent Sufis of his time like al-Junayd or al-Shiblī. Iblīs was threatened with eternal damnation and Pharaoh was drowned, but neither abandoned his claim, and that was worth emulating. To al-Ḥallāj, Iblīs and Pharaoh were martyrs in a sense, because they lost their lives for the sake of their *futuwwa*; and therefore, al-Ḥallāj viewed his own proclamation "I am the Truth" in the same light. He predicted his own gruesome end and declared that even if he was going to be tortured, he could not go back on his claim because like Iblīs, he saw himself as a sign of the Truth.

al-Ḥallāj then describes in an enigmatic exposé each letter of Iblīs's former name, which was ʿAzāzīl:

> The name of Iblīs is derived from the altered [name] ʿAzāzīl. The letter *ʿayn* is for the steadfastness (*ʿalq)* of his resolve (*himmatihi*); the letter *zāʾ* is for the increasing of his overabundance (*izdiyād al-ziyādatihi*); the letter *alif* is for expansion of his affection (*ulfatihi*); and the second *zāʾ* is for ascetic abstinence (*zuhd*) from his rank; the letter *yāʾ* is for seeking sanctuary (*yaʾwī*) in his ecstasy and the letter *lām* is for his disputation (*mujādilatihi*) for his affliction (*balliyatihi*).[508]

This is more than a simple breakdown of ʿAzāzīl's name. al-Ḥallāj alludes here to the grandeur of a celestial being who as a perfect ascetic, was resolute in his mission, with having ever increasing qualities, and who had love only for God and sought refuge in the ecstasy of knowing God. To al-

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[508] al-Ḥallāj, *al-Ṭawāsīn*, 52.

Ḥallāj, no being, aside from God, could represent such a perfection that was worthy of aspiring to and emulating.

al-Ḥallāj was well aware of the exoteric hostility that God showed toward Iblīs, but unlike most Muslim theologians, who often substituted the name "Iblīs" with the title "the enemy of God" (*ʿadūww Allāh*), he believed that Iblīs showed no resentment toward God, even exoterically. The love that Iblīs professed for God was eternal and part of his chivalrous ethos, even if he was mocked by God. As al-Ḥallāj explains:

> He [Iblīs] was told [by God]: "O degraded one (*al-mahīn*), why you did not prostrate yourself?" Iblīs said: "I am the lover and the lover is degraded [just] because you say degraded one (*mahīn*). I have read in the clear book (*kitāban mubīnan*) what would befall me, O Possessor of the Strength, the Ever-Sure (*dhā al-quwwat al-matīn*). How could I ever debase myself before him [i.e., Adam] when "You have created me from fire and created him from clay" (Q 7:12) and those are opposites which never converge. I am older in service [to You], and greater in the grace, and in knowledge more educated, and in age more perfect." God told him: "The choice is Mine, not yours." Iblīs said: "All the choices are Yours including mine. You have chosen for me, O Marvelous One, and if You have forbidden me from prostrating myself before him, You are the Forbidder, and if I erred in the debate, do not banish me, and verily You are the All-Hearing. And if You will that I prostrate myself before him [i.e., Adam], verily I am the obedient one. Among all the gnostics (*al-ʿārifīn*) I do not know anyone with more mystical knowledge of You than myself."
>
> Do not blame me, because blame is far from me
> Recompense me O Master, for I am singular (*waḥīd*)

> Verily there is truly the Truth in the promise of Your threat
> Verily in the beginning of the beginning my case was severe
>
> Whoever wants a testament, here is my report
> Read and know that verily I am a *shahīd* (martyr/witness).[509]

This passage is yet another proof that al-Ḥallāj believed Iblīs to be the perfect lover of God. Interestingly, Iblīs takes pride not because of his high status, but because he is degraded and humbled in his love for God, and that makes him better than Adam. Iblīs explains that it was precisely because of the love he had for God that he could not debase himself to anyone or anything other than God. While Iblīs reminds God that he is better than Adam in every way, he nonetheless willingly acknowledges that, in the end, all the choices and the will belong to God alone. As al-Ḥallāj believed, Iblīs also reveals that it was God's choice for him not to prostrate himself before Adam. As the most extraordinary gnostic, he recognized that since pre-eternity this was the plan for him and he therefore rejoices in the fact that his exoteric punishment and banishment were a blessing in disguise. He then invites the seeker to come and learn from his mystical experience as he is, depending on interpretation of the word *shahīd*, either a martyr for love or a witness to the essence of God.

al-Ḥallāj was a master of reinterpreting the obvious meanings of some terms to the point that he sometimes purposely obscures their original meaning. Nowhere is this more evident that when he reinterprets the name ʿAzāzīl:

> O my brother! He is called ʿAzāzīl because he was set apart (*ʿuzila*), and he was separated (*maʿzūl*) [from the rest] in his friendship. He did not return from his beginning (*bidāyatihi*) to his end (*nihāyatihi*) because he has not emerged from his end

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[509] al-Ḥallāj, *al-Ṭawāsīn*, 53–54.

> [yet]. His emergence is in reverse; in the stability of his anchors, ablaze by the fire of his union night (*bi- nār taʿrīsahu*) and the preceding light (*nūr tarwīsiyahu*) …
>
> O my brother! If you understood, then you have trodden the narrow path in its very narrowness and imagined the imaginal and returned concealed and were annihilated resolutely.[510]

al-Ḥallāj interprets the term *ʿuzila* not as dismissed, but as set apart or secluded, and therefore he states that Iblīs was *maʿzūl*, that is, someone who was chosen and then secluded by God because of the tremendous friendship and jealousy between them. The description of some of the enigmatic qualities of Iblīs is somewhat obscure. One interpretation of the beginning and the end could be that one can never fully comprehend the enigma of Iblīs, because as a manifestation of God, he is unfathomable and without end. When he finally manifests himself and emerges, it would be in complete opposition to the way in which he was banished from God's presence. He will be grounded in certitude and stability, basking in the light of his union with God. He tells the select reader that if they understood his cryptic writings, they might be on the same path that Iblīs trod, which is the path of imagination beyond the transient realities of this world, leading to both the physical and mystical annihilation of the self.

al-Ḥallāj warns that even the most perfected Sufis are incapable of comprehending Iblīs's rank:

> The most eloquent of the [Sufi] community (*fuṣaḥāʾ al-qaum*) were dumbstruck in regard to his [i.e., Iblīs] affairs and the gnostics (*ʿurafāʾ*) became incapacitated in what they have learned. He [i.e., Iblīs] was the most insightful one among them [i.e., the

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[510] al-Ḥallāj, *al-Ṭawāsīn*, 54–55.

> angels] about the prostration and the most proximate one [to God] in all of existence and the most self-sacrificing one in the [way of his] endeavor and the most faithful to the covenants and the closest one to the Deity. They [i.e., the angels] prostrated themselves as a favor, and Iblīs refused to prostrate himself because of the long period of [his] witnessing [of God].[511]

This is the most complete vindication of Iblīs by any Sufi author. Fed up with orthodoxy of all religious stripes, including his fellow Sufis, al-Ḥallāj found in Iblīs an alternative model for emulation. Iblīs was not only a vehicle for the dissemination of al-Ḥallāj's ideas in describing the concept of untainted *tauḥīd*, but the exemplar of the purest form of divine love. Even when that love made al-Ḥallāj a heretic and a martyr, he gladly embraced it the way Iblīs, his only companion and master, did. This made al-Ḥallāj the greatest ecstatic Sufi of all time, and Persian Sufis like ʿAyn al-Qużāt were so mesmerized by his message that they became exegetes of many of his ideas, including his Iblisology.

4.4 ʿAyn al-Qużāt Hamadānī

The passion and martyrdom of al-Ḥallāj had a tremendous effect on the psyche of many Sufis. His enigmatic statements resonated with many Persian mystics who praised him as the ultimate Sufi lover of God. Perhaps the most prominent of those Persian Sufis who not only continued disseminating the ideas of Hallajian Iblisology, but also expanded and systematized them, was Abū al-Maʿālī ʿAbd Allāh Muḥammad Miyānjī, who is better known as ʿAyn al-Qużāt Hamadānī His forefathers belonged to a family of judges from Hamadān with a history of violent death, as

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[511] al-Ḥallāj, *al-Ṭawāsīn*, 55.

his grandfather was executed when serving as the judge (*qāżī)* of Hamadān and his father also came to a violent end. At a young age, Abū al-Maʿālī was also appointed as judge, and he came to be known in Sufi circles as *ʿAyn al-Qużāt* ("the eye of the judges").[512] After his initiation into Sufism, he preached and wrote a series of sermons and books that irked the religious establishment both in Baghdad and in his hometown of Hamadān, which resulted in his anathematization and subsequent gruesome execution in 525/1131.

4.4.1 ʿAyn al-Qużāt and His Iblisophile Teachers

4.4.1.1 Aḥmad Ghazālī

There are many similarities between the life and teaching of al-Ḥallāj and those of ʿAyn al-Qużāt. Like al-Ḥallāj, many of ʿAyn al-Qużāt's Sufi masters were Iblisophiles. The most prominent among them was Aḥmad Ghazālī (d. ca. 520/1126), the younger brother of the famous theologian and jurist Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad Ghazālī (d. 504/1111). It was Aḥmad Ghazālī who initiated ʿAyn al-Qużāt into the Sufi path and perhaps introduced him to a different side of Iblīs. ʿAyn al-Qużāt himself recounts in his work *Zubdat al-ḥaqāyiq* that after learning many sciences of the time, he was lost at the end, and even reading the works of the great scholars of his time such as Muḥammad Ghazālī for four years did not help him break free of doubt and confusion.[513] As ʿAyn al-Qużāt explains, a miracle happened when Aḥmad Ghazālī, whom he calls "my master and my lord," came to Hamadān, and in less than twenty days, he says that all the secrets were revealed to him and from then on he sought nothing else but his own annihilation in the Truth.[514]

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[512] *Encyclopædia Iranica*, s.v. "ʿAyn-Al-Qożāt Hamadānī."

[513] ʿAyn-al-Qużāt Abū al-Maʿālī ʿAbd Allāh b. Muḥammad Miyānjī Hamadānī, *Zubdat al-ḥaqāyiq* in *Muṣannafāt ʿAyn-al-Qużāt Hamadānī*, ed. ʿAfīf ʿUsayrān (Tehran: Chāpkhāna-yi Dānishgāh, 1341/1962), 1:6.

[514] Hamadānī, *Zubdat al-ḥaqāyiq*, 1:7.

Despite being an ardent Iblisophile, there are only a handful of references to Iblīs in Aḥmad Ghazālī's writings. In his *Savāniḥ al-ʿushshāq*, in which he personifies love and describes its characteristics, he states:

> Love has such a high resolve (*himmat*) that it only accepts a beloved with a lofty disposition. Hence, he [i.e., love] will not accept any beloved which falls into the trap of the union (*viṣāl*) [with the lover]. It was based on this point that when Iblīs was told [by God]: "And verily upon you is My curse" (Q 38:78), he responded: "Then, by your exaltedness (*fa-bi-ʿizzatika*) [I will lead them all astray]" (Q 38:82). It means that I [i.e., Iblīs] do love this exaltedness from You; that to You no gate may be opened and no one can be worthy of You, for if there was someone worthy of You then Your exaltedness (*ʿizzat*) would not be perfect.[515]

According to Aḥmad Ghazālī, it was this personification of love that set the tone for the relationship between God and Iblīs. God as the Beloved with perfect exaltedness could not be in union with anyone, and Iblīs as the perfect lover welcomed God's rejection and threat because that proved that as a Beloved with perfection of exaltedness, He remained out of reach for the lover, or for that matter anyone else who sought union with Him. Therefore, the God's rejection of Iblīs was the best example of the Beloved's exaltedness, which was also desired by the lover and dictated by love. As the rejected lover, Iblīs swore to the exaltedness of the Beloved that he will bar all the unworthy ones from reaching the threshold of union with Him.

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[515] Aḥmad Ghazālī, *Savāniḥ al-ʿushshāq* in *Majmūʿa-yi āṯār-i fārsī-yi Aḥmad Ghazālī*, ed. Aḥmad Mujāhid, 3rd ed. (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tihrān, 1376/1998), 49.

Ibn Ḥajar al-ʻAsqalānī (d. 852/1449) in his *Lisān al-mizān* related that Aḥmad Ghazālī had a sympathetic zeal (*taʿaṣṣub*) toward Iblīs and once said: "He [i.e., Iblīs] is the master of believers in the unity of God (*sayyid al-muwaḥḥidin*)," and on another occasion "Whoever does not learn from Iblīs the [concept of] the oneness of God (*tauḥīd*) is a heretic (*zindīq*), because he [i.e., Iblīs] was ordered to prostrate himself before someone other than his Master [i.e., God] and he refused."[516]

Naṣr Allāh Pūrjavādī has noted that many of the ideas which reverberate in the writings of Persian Sufi authors such as Aḥmad Ghazālī and ʿAyn al-Qużāt are the extended exegesis of al-Ḥallāj's worldview. Pūrjavādī calls these Sufi authors Neo-Hallajians (*nau-Ḥallājiyān*).[517] When it comes to Iblīs, this Neo-Hallajian vision becomes even more pronounced. In Aḥmad Ghazālī's writings, it manifests itself in the way he retells al-Ḥallāj's story about the meeting of Moses and Iblīs on Mount Sinai. The first version of this story is recounted by the Muʿtazila historian and jurist Abū Ḥāmid Hibat Allāh ibn Abū al-Ḥadīd (d. 655/1257):

> Aḥmad Ghazālī said that Moses and Iblīs once met on a precipice at Mount Sinai. Moses said: "O Iblīs! Why did you not prostrate yourself before Adam?" Iblīs said: "Never! I will not prostrate myself before a human. How can I claim His Oneness (*auḥḥaduhu*) and then pay attention to someone other than Him? But you, O Moses, asked to see God but then [were content to] look at the mountain. Therefore, I am more sincere in my *tauḥīd* than you."[518]

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[516] Aḥmad ibn ʿAlī Ibn Ḥajar al-ʿAsqalānī, *Lisān al-mīzān*, ed. Salmān ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ Abū Ghudda (Beirut: Dār al-Bashāʾir al-Islāmiyya, 1423/2002), 1:649.

[517] Naṣr Allāh Pūrjavādī, *Kirishma-yi ʿishq: Maqālātī dar ʿirfān-i nau Ḥallājī-yi Irān* (Tehran: Nau, 1393/2015), 12–14.

[518] Abū Ḥāmīd ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd b. Hībat-Allāh Ibn Abū al-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ "Nahj al-Balāgha,"* ed. Muḥammad Ibrāhīm (Baghdad: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿArabī, 1428/2007), 1:67.

This is almost the same idea expressed by al-Ḥallāj in his *Ṭawāsīn* regarding the encounter between Moses and Iblīs on Mount Sinai. As in the case of al-Ḥallāj's version, it is Iblīs who mocks Moses, who instead of witnessing God in His true essence, was content with the mere manifestation of God to the mountain, which for Iblīs was nothing short of polytheism.

Another account of the conversation between Iblīs and Moses attributed to Aḥmad Ghazālī is mentioned by jurist and historian ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAlī b. Muḥammad Abū al-Faraj Ibn al-Jauzī (d. 597/1200), and it is again very similar to the one in al-Ḥallāj's *Ṭawāsīn*. According to Ibn al-Jauzī, Ghazālī said:

> Moses told him [i.e., Iblīs] "Your form was changed from an angel into a Satan." Iblīs responded: "This is only a state (*ḥāl*) which will change (*yuḥawwil*) and I will [eventually] change back, O Moses. But know this: that the more His [i.e., God's] love (*maḥabba*) increases toward anyone other than me, the more My love (*ʿishq*) increases for Him." Moses asked him: "Do you [still] mention and remember Him?" Iblīs responded: "I am the one who is the subject of His remembrance 'And upon you is My curse (*inna ʿalayka laʿnatī*" (Q 38:78)). Is that not enough that in His curse there are [the letters] "you" (*kāf*) [in *ʿalayka*] and "My" (*yāʾ*) [in *laʿnatī*]?"[519]

Regarding the last sentence of this passage Iblīs is boasting to Moses that for him, the two letters that occur in the Qurʾanic verse "*ʿalayka laʿnatī*", namely the letter *kāf* in *ʿalayka* (upon you) and *yāʾ* in *laʿnatī* (My curse), prove his eternal and unbreakable bond with God because God had

[519] Abū Faraj ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. ʿAlī Ibn al-Jauzī, *Kitāb al-quṣṣāṣ wa al-mudhakkirīn*, ed. Muḥammad b. Luṭfī al-Ṣabbāq (Beirut: al-Maktab al-Islāmī, 1403/1983), 313–14.

personally addressed him and bestowed upon him His curse. (recall how al-Shiblī was jealous of Iblīs for having the curse bestowed upon him as an honor by God).

al-Ḥallāj's Iblisology also reverberates in the sayings of Aḥmad Ghazālī, who believed that the nature of Iblīs's transformation from an angel to a Satan was only temporary, and the essential thing was the unchanging and mutual love between him and God. Ghazālī however, used two different words to describe this love. He indicates that God's love toward others, primarily humans, is *muḥḥaba*, which is the Qurʾanic term for love. Sufis often stress a few Qurʾanic verses to demonstrate the reciprocal love that existed between them and God. The most important is Q 5:54, which states "O you who have believed, whoever of you should revert from his religion God will bring forth [in their place] a people He loves and who love Him (*yuḥibbuhum wa yuḥibbunahu*)." The term which is used for love in this and similar verses is from the verb *ḥubb.* But another term for love which denotes a much greater passion than *ḥubb* yet is never mentioned in the Qurʾan is *ʿishq*, which occurs extensively in Sufi literature to describe the Sufis' love toward God. In this conversation, Ghazālī indicates that as God increases His *ḥūbb* for others—meaning humans—it causes Iblīs to increase his *ʿishq* for Him. Therefore, the Iblīs that Ghazālī depicts is fundamentally different from the jealous Iblīs that the Qurʾan and *qiṣaṣ* literature portray, because he bears the marks of the mature lover (*ʿāshiq-i pukhta*). Ghazālī is so sure of Iblīs's maturity that he even stated: "Ever since Iblīs was banished, nothing has been deficient in his services, his love, and his remembrance [toward God]."[520]

The longest rendition of this encounter between Moses and Iblīs is told by Aḥmad Ghazālī in his *Majālis*, but in this version Iblīs discloses more information about his refusal to prostrate himself before Adam:

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[520] Ibn al-Jauzī, *Kitāb al-quṣṣāṣ*, 313.

Moses and Iblīs met at on a precipice at Mount Sinai. Moses asked Iblīs: "Why did you not prostrate yourself before Adam?" Iblīs said: "Never! Heaven forbid! God is One. For seven hundred thousand years I kept saying [to God]; 'All Holy One, All Hallowed One.' How could I darken the countenance of my worshiping with dualism? Moses said: "O Iblīs, why did you abandon the commandment?" Iblīs responded: "That was not the commandment of trial (*ibtilāʾ*). If it was the commandment of [His] will (*irāda*), O Moses, I would claim the Unity of God (*tauḥīd*).

If I am dismembered piece by piece
My heart would not complain to anyone other than Him.

But you asked to see Him and said: 'I want to see You', but then turned to [see] the mountain. By God if you had not turned you would see Him. Therefore, I am more sincere than you in *tauḥīd*." Moses said: "Verily your intellect is taken away from you!" Iblīs said: "O Moses, that was the decision of the Judge and His desire… I am beholden by love and longing, and I am in paradise and fire." Moses said: "O Iblīs! Despite being cursed you have a sweetness in your words." Iblīs said: "I have gained it through my experiences, O Moses! I worshipped Him for seven hundred thousand years on account of desire and covetousness (*al-ṭamaʿ*) and having desire while being in the state of slavehood [to God] leads to destruction. Therefore, I broke the desire. Now my remembrance [of God] is brighter and my worship is sweeter. O Moses! Do you know

why He banished me? So that I might not mix with the sincere ones and therefore not worship Him out of enthusiasm or fear or hope or desire."[521]

This is yet another rendition of al-Ḥallāj's story of the meeting between Iblīs and Moses. Like al-Ḥallāj, Aḥmad Ghazālī also believed that Iblīs was destined for such a fate and that he had no control over it. He compares this divinely ordained fate to the talons of an eagle which will bloody its prey every time it hunts.[522] In this rendition of the story, Iblīs appears more like a Sufi master giving advice and correcting Moses's mode of thinking. He reminds Moses that it was God's desire to take away his intellect. This is in line with the Sufi perception that the intellect is incapable of understanding the mystical knowledge of God which can only be attained through the heart. The experience of this love and longing made Iblīs capable of eloquently describing the mystical stages to Moses, who appears as a novice. In the end, Iblīs reminds Moses that worshipping God out of any kind of desire will lead only to perdition, and that is why God separates his hidden saints from the rest of his worshipers so that they may love and worship Him, free from hope of reward or fear of punishment.

4.4.1.2 ʿAyn al-Qużāt's Other Iblisophile Masters

Aside from his formal initiation into Sufism by Aḥmad Ghazālī, who until his death was his intimate guide and master, ʿAyn al-Qużāt names several other people as his spiritual masters who were also Iblisophiles. Among them was Baraka Hamadānī (d. ca. 510/1127), who was reportedly an illiterate Sufi for whom ʿAyn al-Qużāt had great respect. ʿAyn al-Qużāt relates in an anecdote:

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[521] Aḥmad Ghazālī, Introduction to *Majmūʿa-yi āṯār-i fārsī-yi Aḥmad Ghazālī*, ed. Aḥmad Mujāhid, 3rd ed. (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Dānishgāh-i Tihrān, 1376/1998), 69–73.

[522] Ibn Abū al-Ḥadīd, *Sharḥ "Nahj al-Balāgha,"* 1:67.

> I have heard from Khʷāja Aḥmad Ghazālī who said: "Shaykh Abū al-Qāsim Gurgānī, (d. ca. 469/1076) never said "Iblīs"; instead, every time he mentioned his [i.e., Iblīs's] name he called him: 'That master of the masters (*khʷāja-yi khʷājagān*) and that chief of the banished ones (*sarvar-i mahjūrān*)'." When I told this account to Baraka, he said: "'The chief of the banished one' is more appropriate than 'master of the masters'."[523]

Pūrjavādī argues that the reason why Baraka preferred the title 'chief of the banished ones' over 'master of the masters' is because, as a banished lover of God, Iblīs shunned any grand titles and instead sought the rank of the dejected lover.[524] On the surface, one can add to that argument that since the title *khʷāja-yi khʷājagān* is generally reserved only for the Prophet Muḥammad, it is not befitting to give it to Iblīs. Was Baraka also concerned about the accusations of apostasy, and reconsidered giving the title of the Prophet to Iblīs? For ʿAyn al-Qużāt, there was little difference between the two titles. The true *khʷāja*s were the ones who were also the banished ones and who were constantly engulfed in the fire of love and longing for the Beloved, and it was fitting for Iblīs to be the chieftain of both groups. As we shall see, for ʿAyn al-Qużāt both the Prophet and Iblīs occupied an equally preeminent cosmic position.

ʿAyn al-Qużāt mentions another Iblisophile master by the name of Fatḥa Barqūyī (d. ca. 514/1120), who was also a close friend and respected Sufi peer of Baraka's. In an anecdote, ʿAyn al-Qużāt indicates that Fatḥa even saw Iblīs:

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[523] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 1:97.

[524] Naṣr Allah Pūrjavādī, "Baraka Hamadānī ustād-i ummī-yi ʿAyn al-Qużāt," *Maʿārif* 3, no.3 (1365/1986) : 522–23.

> I have heard from Baraka, may his soul be sanctified, that Fatḥa once said that Iblīs told him that: "In the entire world, the only person with a kilim blacker than mine is Fatḥa." He said this and cried, and no one knows what it was.[525]

This particular epithet of Iblīs, "the one with the black kilim (*siyāh gilīm*)," will be discussed later, but the fact that Fatḥa was told by Iblīs himself that his kilim was blacker than his shows how sympathetic the circle of ʿAyn al-Qużāt's masters were toward Iblīs. The last part of this section however is unclear. ʿAyn al-Qużāt does not clarifies who is crying—Iblīs, Baraka, or Fatḥa? Perhaps this ambiguity is intentional, as the level of empathy between these Sufis and Iblīs was such that ʿAyn al-Qużāt wanted the reader to assume that it could be any one of them who was commiserating with the plight of the others.

4.5 Iblīs in the Works of ʿAyn al-Qużāt

When it comes to esoteric writings on Iblīs, ʿAyn al-Qużāt is probably the most prolific author in all of Persian literature. Two works in particular, namely his magnum opus the *Tamhīdāt* and his correspondence (*Nāmahā*), contain most of his hermeneutics on Iblīs. ʿAyn al-Qużāt's works may be viewed as both the culmination as well as the exegesis of all the mystical writings on Iblīs by his predecessors, but especially by al-Ḥallāj.

Some of the arguments of ʿAyn al-Qużāt about Iblīs are based on several *hadith*s that he attributes to the Prophet Muḥammad. According to the first hadith, Muḥammad said: "I was sent as a proselytizing leader and there was nothing that associated leadership with me, and Iblīs was

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[525] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 1:96.

created to mislead (*żāl*) and there was nothing that associated misleadingness with him."[526] In another hadith, Muḥammad states: "Verily God created my light from the light of His exaltedness and the light of Iblīs from the fire of His exaltedness."[527] In yet another hadith, Muḥammad states: "If God wanted to forgive everyone He would not have created Iblīs."[528] ʿAyn al-Qużāt then interprets this hadith by stating: "If God wanted all of his creation to be close to Him, He would not have placed Iblīs in the middle as an intermediary and a veil."[529] While the authenticity of the hadiths may be questionable, to ʿAyn al-Qużāt, they were proof that even the Prophet Muḥammad was somewhat sympathetic to the idea of the ambiguous role Iblīs played in creation, and he viewed him not as a free agent but as an extension of Divine will.

4.5.1 Iblīs As the Object of the Beautification of God

The early Islamic theologians often argued about the nature of God's substance. While most believed God was not made out of any physical substance, there were some sects, especially among the Shia, who believed that God had a face. Among them was Hishām ibn Sālim Jawālīqī (d. after 183/799), a Persian Shia theologian who was branded an extremist (*ghālī*). He believed God had a face like humans which radiated a mesmerizing, brilliant light.[530] He also believed that God had black peach-fuzz around His face which was the black light, but the rest of his face was white light.[531]

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[526] ʿAyn-al-Qużāt Abū al-Maʿālī ʿAbd Allāh b. Muḥammad Miyānjī Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, ed. ʿAfīf ʿUsayrān, 8th ed. (Tehran: Manūchihrī, 1389/2010), 186.

[527] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 267.

[528] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 217.

[529] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 217.

[530] Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Ismāʿīl al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyin wa ikhtilāf al-muṣallīn*, ed. Muḥammad Muḥyī al-Dīn ʿAbd al-Ḥamīd (Beirut: Maktabat al-ʿAṣriyya, 1411/1990), 1:109.

[531] al-Ashʿarī, *Maqālāt al-islāmiyyin*, 1:109; al-Baghdādī, *al-Farq bayn al-firaq*, 68.

Some Persian Sufis later metaphorically anthropomorphised God's beauty and referred to Him to as idol (*but*), icon (*nigār*), and beautiful person (*shāhid*). This last term, *shāhid*, which also means "witness," is used extensively by ʿAyn al-Qużāt as a metaphor to describe God with the countenance of the beautiful Beloved. After passing through many stations, the Sufi seeker (*sālik*) will finally encounter the beautiful countenance of the *shāhid*. As ʿAyn al-Qużāt explains, the beauty of this divine countenance depends on some features, including the cheeks (*khadd*), the beauty mark (*khāl*), the curled tress (*zulf*), the eyes (*chashm*), and the eyebrows (*abrū*). In Persian, these markers of the beauty of the *shahīd* are often paired, as in *khadd va khāl* and *zulf va chashm va abrū*.[532] According to ʿAyn al-Qużāt, while the light of the Prophet Muḥammad, or the Muhammadan light, is the *khadd va khāl* of the divine *Shāhid*, Iblīs is His *zulf va chashm va abrū*. After reaching the Muhammadan light, the mystic lover becomes an unbeliever (*kāfir*) and professes unbelief (*kufr*).[533] This is yet another theory that ʿAyn al-Qużāt espouses which holds that in order to become a true believer (*muʾmin*), one has to first become a complete *kāfir*. According to this theory, since all of our beliefs are illusory, this kind of unbelief is the root of all belief.[534] It is through experiencing the beliefs of idol worshippers that one can reach the boundary of belief (*sar-ḥadd-i īmān*).[535]

It is only after this that the *sālik* can see the *zulf va chashm va abrū*. ʿAyn al-Qużāt says it would be impossible for one to see all of these beauty markers of the *Shahīd* not ecstatically utter "I am the Truth" (*anā al-ḥaqq*) the way al-Ḥallāj did.[536] This perhaps demonstrates why ʿAyn al-Qużāt must be considered the best exegete of Hallajian Iblisology, as he was the only medieval

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[532] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 116–18.
[533] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 117–18.
[534] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 1:309–11.
[535] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 118.
[536] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 119.

Iblisophile who provided an accurate context, not an apology, as in the case of Ruzbihān Baqlī (d. 605/1209), for some of al-Ḥallāj's most difficult ideas. In explaining the value of the markers of beauty which are metaphors for Iblīs, ʿAyn al-Qużāt states:

> People only heard the name of Iblīs. They do not know he has such a coquettish pride (*nāz*) in his head that he does not care about anyone. Ah! Why should he not have such a *nāz* in his head. Because it has become the close companion of the cheeks and beauty mark (*khadd va khāl*) [which are metaphors for Muḥammad]. What do you say? Can the *khadd va khāl* have any perfection (*kamāl*) on their own without the lock and eyebrows and tress (*zulf va abrū va mūy*)? By God they do not have any perfection. Can you not see that in prayers it is obligatory to recite [the phrase] "I take refuge in God from the banished Satan"? Because of this, he [i.e., Iblīs] has such a great coquettish pride, amorous gestures and bodacious demeanor (*nāz va ghunj va dalāl*). He is the chief of boastful ones and narcissists.[537]

ʿAyn al-Qużāt makes a daring claim here by stating that the Prophet Muḥammad, represented by *khadd va khāl*, was not perfected without the presence of Iblīs, and therefore in order to completely appreciate the beauty of the *Shāhid* (i.e., God), the existence of these two complementary beings was essential.

Elsewhere in the *Tamhīdat*, ʿAyn al-Qużāt quotes an anonymous quatrain:

> There is a beauty mark close to the lips of my beloved
> I take it as a seal made out of musk on the cache of sugar

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[537] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 121.

> Even if the King of Ethiopia threatens me with my life
> I will break that seal and will take the sugar.[538]

He explains that the beauty mark, or the *khāl*, is the Prophet Muḥammad, who is like a seal (*muhr*) on the countenance of the *shāhid*, and God's beauty cannot be complete without him. On their spiritual journey, hundreds of thousands of Sufi lovers were sacrificed for this *khāl*, and after passing by it there will remain only one more veil (*ḥijāb*) before they reach the beauty of God's countenance. This *ḥijāb*, as ʿAyn al-Qużāt describes it in a hemistich, is the station (*maqām*) where "there is no path except through the tips of the two tresses of the beloved (*bīrūn zi sar-i dau zulf-i shāhid rah nīst*)."[539] This clearly indicates that without an encounter with Iblīs, the seeker has no other path to the *Shāhid.*

In Persian literature the ruler of each land or clime (*iqlīm*) has a traditional title: *qayṣar*, or Caesar, for Byzantium; *khāqān* or *faghfūr* for the Turkic or Chinese lands; and *shāh* for Abyssinia. ʿAyn al-Qużāt explains who the mystical *shāh* of Abyssinia is:

> Alas! Do you know who the king of Abyssinia (*shāh-i Ḥabash*) is? He is the chamberlain (*parda-dār*) of "*illā Allāh,*" whom you call Iblīs, and whose job is to trick. His sustenance is the curse [of God] and [he said to God:] "By Your exaltedness I will lead them all astray" (Q 38:82). Do you assume the *Shāhid* has any beauty without the [black] tress?[540]

Portraying Iblīs as the *shāh-i Ḥabash* is obviously a reference to his blackness. In this passage ʿAyn al-Qużāt places the station of Iblīs above that of Muḥammad because the *sālik* first has to

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[538] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 29.
[539] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 29.
[540] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 30.

pass by the *khāl*, and it is only then that he is shown the last veil, which is Iblīs. In his letters, ʿAyn al-Qużāt stresses that witnessing the *khāl* on the face of the Beloved is possible only through Iblīs.[541]

4.5.2 Iblīs the Black Light (*nūr-i siyāh*)

The concept of Iblīs as the divine black light (*nūr-i siyāh*) was first formulated by ʿAyn al-Qużāt, although he himself attributes it to Abū al-Ḥasan Bustī (d. ca 472/1080). Before theorizing on the concept of Iblīs, ʿAyn al-Qużāt began to introduce this concept based on the famous Qurʾanic Light which states "God is the light of the heavens and the earth" (Q 24:35). God is an existence (*vujūd*) which is an independent essence (*jauhar ẕāt*) and his light is a contingent (*ʿaraż*) of that essence.[542] He then explains that God's light is what gives luminosity to all other things including other lights. As Q 24:35 states that God is the light of the heavens and the earth, ʿAyn al-Qużāt concludes that one is the Muhammadan light and the other is the Iblisian light, without specifying which belongs to whom.[543] He explains that the world of annihilation and singleness (*fanā va fard)* demands the unicity (*fardiyyat*) of the essence; but when God began to create, according to the Qurʾanic verse "And we have created all things in pairs" (Q 51:49), a duality came into being in the world of existence and visibility (*baqāʾ va mushāhidat*).[544]

Before expounding on the blackness of this light, ʿAyn al-Qużāt introduced the concept of Iblisian light by quoting the early ascetic Sufi Ḥasan al-Baṣrī (d. 110/728) who said: "Verily, the light of Iblīs is from the fire of [God's] exaltedness (*al-ʿizza*)… and if he [i.e., Iblīs] manifests his

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[541] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 1:415.
[542] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 257.
[543] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 258.
[544] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 267.

light to people they worship him as a god."[545] As ʿAyn al-Qużāt illustrates, in the Qurʾan, when God makes an oath by the sun and moon or by day and night, He really means the two respective lights of Muḥammad and Iblīs. He presents this hypothesis as follows:

> Do you know what this sun is? It is the Muhammadan Light which rises in the pre-eternal east (*mashriq-i azalī*). Do you know what was in the moonlight? It is the dark light of ʿAzāzīl which will set in the eternal west (*maghrib-i abadī*). [The verse] "Lord of the two Easts, and Lord of the two Wests" (Q 55:17) perfected this discourse and made it clearer.[546]

ʿAyn al-Qużāt states that when God swears in the Qurʾan by the daylight, he means the beautiful face of Prophet Muḥammad, but when he swears by the night, He means "the amber scented dark tress," which is the metaphor for Iblīs.[547] Elsewhere ʿAyn al-Qużāt indicates that if the *sālik* arrives at a station (*maqām*) where two lights present themselves, one is the *khāl* and the other is the *zulf*—which in reality are the same as the Muhammadan light and the Iblisian light, and the *sālik* has to deal with these two *maqāms* until eternity.[548]

The duality of these two lights shared by Muḥammad and Iblīs is demonstrated in two attributes of God as well or as Awns cleverly recognized, in the divine essence.[549] As ʿAyn al-Qużāt explains, Muḥammad is the representation of the beauty (*jamāl*) of God while Iblīs is the representation of His majesty (*jalāl*). This *jalāl* manifests itself in the curse that God bestowed

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[545] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 211
[546] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 126.
[547] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 127.
[548] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 30.
[549] Awn, *Satan's Tragedy and Redemption*, 138.

upon Iblīs when he said: "My curse will be upon you" (Q 38:78).[550] According to ʿAyn al-Qużāt, this black light is shown only to the select *sāliks*:

> Alas! Have they not made manifest to you the black light (*nūr-i siyāh*) on top of God's Throne (*ʿarsh*)? That is the light of Iblīs which they made from the tress of the *Shāhid* and it is dark only in comparison to the Divine light (*nūr-i ilāhī*). Otherwise, it is a [bright] light… Do you know what that *nūr-i siyāh* is*?* His robe of honor (*khilʿat*) is made out of [the Qurʾanic verse] "And he became one of the unbelievers" (Q 38:74).[551]

For ʿAyn al-Qużāt, the vision of this *nūr-i siyāh* is personal. He relates that one day, his master—most likely Baraka—began his obligatory prayer by saying: "I became an unbeliever and I have fastened a *zunnār* (a religious belt worn by non-Muslims)" and then began to pray. When he finished his prayers, he told ʿAyn al-Qużāt:

> "You have not yet reached the midway of the stage of God's servitude (*bandagī*) and you have not been allowed to go beyond the veil of the black light whose chamberlain (i.e., Iblīs) is [the one who said:] 'By Your exaltedness I will lead them all astray' (Q 38:81). Exert yourself until you are let in."[552]

This black light is the Sufi stage which the *sālik* must reach before witnessing the Reality. As ʿAyn al-Qużāt explains:

> You think you know the Qurʾan? By God you do not. When the *sālik* achieves the second birth (*vilādat-i ṯānī*) there remain the angelic veils between him and God. Then

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[550] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 73.
[551] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 118–19.
[552] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 48–49.

> they will be lifted one after another. The last veil is a black light (*nūr-i siyāh*) which [is where] the dualists [i.e., Zoroastrian] stop and they refer to it as Yazdān and Ahriman. If they had the attributes of [Abraham,] the Friend (*khalīl*) [of God], they could discern that the black light is not the ultimate destination.[553]

ʿAyn al-Qużāt attributes the creation of this light to the sagacity of God and states: "Ah! Darkness without light and light without darkness has no perfection."[554] However, as he explains in his letters, not everyone can comprehend the mysterious and often ironic ways of God, and the best example of this perplexity is the way God treated Iblīs:

> He [i.e., God] drowns you in black and smoky waters and will disgrace you in the eyes of the creatures of both worlds. Despite this he does not want even the archangels Gabriel and Michael to have knowledge about [the truth of] this. He will make your face black and at the gate of [His] needlessness (*bi-niyāzī*) He will scatter your existence to the wind of carelessness, but if He sees you quiet, He will ask "Why are you not lamenting and wailing?"[555]

Therefore, it is God who runs the entire stage play, and Iblīs repeatedly acknowledges that he is nothing but an obedient puppet in the hands of the master puppeteer.

4.5.3 Iblīs the Chamberlain, the Guardian

Another major theme of ʿAyn al-Qużāt's Iblisology is the role Iblīs plays as the guardian (*pāsbān*),

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[553] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 1:90.
[554] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 122.
[555] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 1:285.

the chamberlain (*parda-dār*), and the slave-soldier (*ghulām*) of such attributes of God as His exaltedness (*ʿizzat*) and severity (*qahr*). In explaining these concepts, ʿAyn al-Qużāt creates a theosophical theory of his own in which he takes the phrase used for the Muslim declaration of the faith (*shahāda)*, which states: "There is no deity except God (*lā ilāha illā Allāh*)," and esotericizes it. According to this theory, the first part of the phrase "There is no deity" (*lā ilāha*) is the realm of servitude and temperament (*ʿubūdiyyat va fiṭrat*), while the second part of the phrase "except God" (*illā Allāh*) is the divine realm and the territory of God's exaltedness (*ʿizzat*).[556] ʿAyn al-Qużāt explains that in order to reach the stage of *illā Allāh*, the Sufi seeker (*sālik*) must pass through the circle of *lā ilāha*, which is the circle of negation of all things but God. Hundreds of thousands of *sāliks* tried to go beyond this circle but the guardian of His Lordship (*pasbān-i ḥażrat*) of *lā ilāha* stopped them and made them confused and perplexed.[557] ʿAyn al-Qużāt asks:

> Do you know who the *pāsbān-i ḥażrat* is? He is the slave soldier (*ghulām*) of [God's] attribute of severity (*qahr*) whose stature (*qāmat*) is like the [letter] *alif*, and [he] is Iblīs. He comes and he may cause them [i.e., the seekers] to stray from the path so that those poor ones may remain in the realm of negation of *lā* and worship their own whim and ego.[558]

In other places, ʿAyn al-Qużāt describes the duty of Iblīs as a guardian in association with the Qurʾanic verses:

> He has drawn the sword of [the Qurʾanic verse]: "By Your exaltedness I will lead them all astray" (Q 38:82). In the murkiness of "In the darkness of the land and the sea" (Q

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[556] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 74.
[557] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 74.
[558] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 74.

> 6:97) he has chosen superiority and made himself free. He is the guardian (*pāsbān*) of [God's] exaltedness (*ʿizzat*). He is the gatekeeper of the [Qurʾanic phrase] "I take refuge in God from the banished Satan" (*darbān-i hażrat-i "aʿuẕu bi-Allāh min al-shayṭan al-rajīm"*).[559]

The esoteric interpretation of these Qurʾanic verses allows ʿAyn al-Qużāt to re-formulate the role of Iblīs as the chief guardian of the sanctity of God's exaltedness who bars any unworthy person and examines the veracity of a person's claim to profess love for God.

In ʿAyn al-Qużāt's correspondence he praises this God-given role of Iblīs as a guardian who even tests the prophets:

> If the [Qurʾanic verse] "And God spoke to Moses directly" (Q 4:164) is a sign of perfection, then Iblīs also possesses such perfection. What do you know about who Iblīs really is? He is the prefect (*shaḥna*) of the realm [of God] where 124,000 prophets are injured by him. "[O Muḥammad] And We did not send before you any messenger or prophet except that when he spoke [or recited], Satan threw into it [some misunderstanding]" (Q 22:52).[560]

In the eyes of ʿAyn al-Qużāt, Iblīs's rank is perhaps the most unattainable and the Sufi who wants to reach it must not only be dedicated but also fortunate:

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[559] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 119
[560] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 1:96.

> O Chivalrous Sufi! You cannot find a path to the place in which Iblīs resides. How can you find such good fortune (*daulat*)? If, by any chance, you ever arrive there, [you will see that] on the curtain at the door of his royal palace it is written:
>
> O Beloved Idol! I will bear the tyranny and I will battle.
> I will never mix with Your love the love for another.
>
> I have a soul which bears the burden of Your love.
> I will not run away until I sacrifice it for Your sake.
>
> There are thousands upon thousands of such sultans, the likes of whom you are afraid of, who are readily serving him. Nay there are a thousand dog-keepers (*sag-dār*) at his court and each possesses such a realm (*mamlakat*) that your intellect and imagination cannot comprehend its rank. And if it is described, you could not comprehend it. One must possess the qualities of Gabriel (*jibraʿīl ṣifat*) in order to have a furtive glance (*duzdīda naẓar*) at the beauty of Iblīs.[561]

ʿAyn al-Qużāt does not shy away from the fact that when Iblīs promised to lead humanity astray, he was being sincere. However, he compares Iblīs to a saddle boy of the King who sometimes rides the horse but who does not make the horse his own.[562] In fact, God as the ultimate sultan gave him the imperial permission (*ṭughrā-yi sulṭānī*) to "Incite [to senselessness] whoever you can among them with your voice and assault them with your horses and foot soldiers and become a partner in their wealth and their children" (Q 17:64).[563] As ʿAyn al-Qużāt puts it, Iblīs takes and

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[561] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 1:97.
[562] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 1:426.
[563] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 1:426.

beats in accordance with God's command, and he has no authority over the ones who are sincere in their faith.[564] This point is also explained in one of his letters:

> O dear one! What would Gabriel and Iblīs really do if God were not the one who said "He [i.e., God] leads astray whom He wills and guides whom He wills" (Q 17:93)? Even if I accept that Iblīs is the one who leads people astray, who created Iblīs in this manner?[565]

But how can one avoid being led astray by God? Since God states: "Do they feel secure against God's schemes (*makr*)" (Q 7:99), ʿAyn al-Qużāt, like many other Sufis, emphasizes that one has to be vigilant; and the best way to do that is to be a student at the school of Iblīs (*maktab-i Iblīs*).[566]

According to ʿAyn al-Qużāt, everyone was involved in God's scheme regarding Iblīs's downfall and the expulsion of Adam from the Garden. As he explains, no one could have avoided what God had planned for them:

> How can a piece of iron avoid moving toward the magnet when it is placed in front of it? What can the moth who loves the fire do to avoid coming into contact with it? He [i.e., God] told Adam and Eve: "Do not approach this tree" (Q 2:35) and He told the tree: "Pay full attention to Adam so that he may not forget you for a moment." "And God is the best schemer" (Q 3:50). He told Iblīs in secret what He had to tell him. What do you hear? There is no one in heaven and on earth, except for whomever God wills, who go in search of this story! Therefore, He openly told him [i.e., Iblīs]: "Prostrate yourself" and this poor one [i.e., Iblīs] based on what He ordered him to say in secret

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[564] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 1:426.
[565] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 2:7.
[566] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 2:143

> said: "I will not prostrate myself before the one whom you created out of clay" (Q 17:61). [God] said: "Indeed, upon you is My curse" (Q 38:78). He [i.e., Iblīs] responded: "Since this robe of honor (*khilʿat*) [i.e., the curse] is from You, if You want You can call it a curse, or You can call it a blessing." For Iblīs, on the path to God, all the first ones and the last ones (*avvalīn va ākharīn*) were only children.[567]

This maturity in love stems from the acceptance of God's gift, even if it is the curse which makes him the most perfect lover for Iblisophile Sufis.

4.5.4 Iblīs the Mad, Mature, Chivalrous, and Jealous Lover

Perhaps the most pronounced characteristics of Iblīs in the eyes of ʿAyn al-Qużāt are what makes him the perfect lover. Some of these include madness (*dīvānagī*), which entails abandonment of intellect and reason, which in Sufism are hinderances in becoming a true lover; maturity, which Persian mystics like ʿAyn al-Qużāt compared to the state of being cooked (*pukhta*); and jealousy (*ghayrat*), which prompts the lover to view all of creation as a competitor for the love of the Beloved.[568] The first characteristic of the true lover is his madness. In this category, Iblīs was tested by God and he passed the trial immaculately. As ʿAyn al-Qużāt states:

> That mad lover (*ʿāshiq-i dīvāna*), whom you call Iblīs in this world, do you know what they call him in the Divine World *(ʿālam-i ilahī*)? If you knew his name and called him by it, you would become an unbeliever (*kāfir*). This mad one [i.e., Iblīs] loved God. Do you know what are the touchstones (*miḥakk*) of love? One is calamity and severity

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[567] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 2:186–87.
[568] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 222.

> (*balā va qahr*) and the other is blameworthiness and humiliation (*malāmat va maẕillat*). He [i.e., Iblīs] was told [by God]: "If you claim to love Me you have to show a proof. He was offered the touchstones of calamity and severity, and blameworthiness and humiliation, and he accepted them. In that instant, these two touchstones proved the sincerity of his love.[569]

ʿAyn al-Qużāt explains that the perfection of love is an station (*maqām*) in which the lover prefers the reproach of the Beloved over the favors and praises of others.[570] The lovers of God are given the wine of union a thousand times a day and then are trampled under the foot of separation in order to become perfected. ʿAyn al-Qużāt calls these lovers "the seekers of His Divine Lordship (*jūyandigān-i ḥażrat-i ihāhī*)" to whom God says:

> I have many seekers in the town
> Whoever seeks Me his affair will be miserable.
>
> At My gate there are thousands of gibbets
> On every gibbet hangs a disappointed seeker.[571]

The seekers on the other hand respond: "We know that our Beloved has *qahr* and *balā*, but we sacrifice ourselves for that *balā* and *qahr*. From Him comes *balā* and from us contentment (*riżā*); from Him comes *qahr* and from us love (*mihr*)."[572] Then in this context, ʿAyn al-Qużāt praises Iblīs's love for God:

> What an excellent lover Iblīs is! He says: "We have chosen eternal suffering and let others have the blessings and mercy [of God]." Every day that banished one drinks

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[569] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 221.
[570] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 221–22.
[571] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 222.
[572] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 222–23.

> hundreds of thousands of dregs of wine (*durd*) one after another… What a chivalrous one (*javānmard*)! Ah! One assumes Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj meant the same thing when he said: "No one's claim to chivalry (*futuvvat*) is true except for Aḥmad (i.e., Muḥammad) and Iblīs." The only chivalrous ones and accomplished mystics (*mard-i rasīda*) are these two and the rest are nothing but children on the path. This chivalrous one, Iblīs, says: "If others run away from the slap (*sīlī*) [of God], I will welcome it on the back of my neck." [573]

al-Ḥallāj approach to the concept of *futuwwa* was different. What al-Ḥallāj said in the *Ṭawāsīn* was that "the claims (*al-daʿāwī*) of no one are true save for those made by Iblīs and Aḥmad." al-Ḥallāj elsewhere brought up the issue of *futuwwa* when comparing the claims of Pharaoh and Iblīs to his own. Regardless of whether ʿAyn al-Qużāt knew of these two distinct claims and juxtaposed them on purpose, or whether he made an error in the transmission of al-Ḥallāj's saying, this demonstrates that al-Ḥallāj's Iblisology had tremendous influence in making ʿAyn al-Qużāt the most sophisticated and prolific Iblisophile author in classical Persian literature who was at the same time an exegete of some of the elliptical complexities of Hallajian Iblisology.

ʿAyn al-Qużāt repeats this misquotation of al-Ḥallāj's saying in another place of the *Tamhīdāt* as well as in his letters. In one letter he states: "Bravo to Ḥusayn Manṣūr al-Ḥallāj, who said in the *Kitāb Ṭawāsīn*: 'No one's claim to chivalry (*futuvvat*) is true except for Iblīs and Aḥmad (i.e., Muḥammad)' and then continues to speak as if Iblīs were saying to God:

> "I do not worship You for Your mercy (*raḥmat*). I will forever be in a condition of servitude to You. Do as You please! I am content with whatever You do to me! If

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[573] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 222–24.

> others escape from your curse, it is a crown on my head and a silken brocade for my sleeves… I am capable of going through the eternal suffering. You remain for me even without eternal mercy![574]

This pain and suffering are the true essence of love, which makes the lover forget all else except the Beloved, and that pain becomes the source of nourishment for the lover. As ʿAyn al-Qużāt states:

> People of this world only heard the name of Iblīs but I know that he does not care about anyone as he has his face toward the eternal pain. His sustenance (*qūt*) is His [i.e., God's] curse which he receives constantly, and he drinks it the way God's friends quaff the [wine of] mercy. He [i.e., Iblīs] hates the mercy more than God's friends hate the curse. What do people really know about this point!?[575]

The curse as something that Iblīs desires comes up in a letter in which of ʿAyn al-Qużāt tries to dissuade some Sufis from an odd practice:

> Among the mistakes which some *salīk*s make is that they do a *ṣalavāt* (the special salutation reserved for the Prophet Muḥammad) for Iblīs. This is wrong because the gift for him is truly the curse and he prefers that a lot more [than the *ṣalavāt*].[576]

ʿAyn al-Qużāt also juxtaposes al-Ḥallāj's notion of Iblīs's love for God with the notion of *javānmardī*. He states:

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[574] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 2:187.
[575] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 2:188.
[576] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 1:97.

> Divine love (*ʿishq-i ilāhī*) was divided into two. One part was taken by a chivalrous one (*javānmard*) and the other was taken by another chivalrous one [i.e., Muḥammad and Iblīs]… Aḥmad gave an iota of it to the *muvaḥḥids* and they became the faithful ones (*muʾmin*), and Iblīs gave an iota of it to the Zoroastrians (*mughān*) and they became unbelievers and idol-worshippers.[577]

Therefore, ʿAyn al-Qużāt believes that even the unbelievers have been given divine love, and even though Iblīs is the one who is responsible for their lot, God nonetheless wanted them to be among the believers.

One of the themes associated with Iblīs being identified as a mature lover is what ʿAyn al-Qużāt calls his black kilim (*gilim-i siyāh*). As indicated earlier, ʿAyn al-Qużāt proposes that the first person who mentioned Iblīs as the possessor of the black kilim was his master Baraka. In the medieval Islamic world, kilims were used both as rugs and as a mantle or cloak. Since it was made from low quality wool, it was often used by the poor and that was why it also became part of Sufi attire. ʿAyn al-Qużāt believes that God bestowed upon Iblīs a black kilim which symbolizes the state of his separation and his mournfulness. As a perfect lover, Iblīs accepted it immediately and said:

> When the Beloved made me the companion of his memento (*yādigār*) [i.e., the black kilim], whether the kilim is black or white it will be the same and whoever distinguishes between the two is still raw (*khām*) in [the path of] love. Whether one receives honey or poison, sugar or colocynth, kindness (*lutf*) or severity (*qahr*) from the hands of the Beloved they are one and the same. The person who is in love with either *lutf* or *qahr*

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[577] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 284.

> is in reality in love with themselves and not with the Beloved. Ah! If the King gives someone a special tunic and a hat, this would be sufficient, and lovers do not count on any other thing.[578]

This black kilim is also the metaphor for God's curse. ʿAyn al-Qużāt mentions this point in his letters as well:

> What do you say when the Beloved gives you a black kilim as a memento? And do you think it appropriate if someone takes it away from you and gives you a silken brocade? Never! Never! Only lovers know the value of the Beloved's memento. That is worldly love which says the silken brocade is better than the black kilim. For lovers His curse and mercy are the same. This is the perfection of love![579]

Sufis believed that the pain and suffering (*dard*) stemming from separation from the Beloved was one of the essential elements of the mystical path. This *dard* is what turns an immature lover into a mature one. As ʿAyn al-Qużāt elucidates, this is especially true of Iblīs:

> O friend! Do you know why Iblīs is in pain? His pain stems from the fact that he was the treasurer of Paradise and he was one of those close [to God]. He went from that station (*maqām*) to the lower world (*dunyā*). He was given the royal mandate (*manshūr*) as treasurer of the lower world (*dunyā*) and Hell (*dūzakh*). Alas! Do you know what he said? He said: "For several thousand years I was a hermit (*muʿtakif*) in the street of the Beloved (*kūy-i maʿshuq*). When He accepted me, my portion (*naṣīb*)

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[578] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 224.
[579] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 1:97–98.

> from Him was rejection… when His mercy came upon me, He cursed me and said: 'And My curse will be upon you until Judgment day'"(Q 38:78).[580]

This is another example that demonstrates that Iblīs did not view his situation as tragic, but as a blessing and mercy from God. In fact, ʿAyn al-Qużāt interprets the phrase "Judgment Day" not as a day of reckoning, but as a day when the true religion (*dīn*) will be manifested:

> O friend! God said, "My curse will be upon you until Judgment Day" (*yaum al-dīn*) (Q 38:78). When this happens on the day of [true] religion (*dīn*), that does not mean this worldly religion but the religion of the *Hereafter* in which there is forbearance (*kam-zanī*) and the creed of unicity (*millat-i yigānigī*) will be the religion. In this world this is *kufr* but in the path of the *sāliks* and in their religion both belief and unbelief are the same.[581]

Like al-Ḥallāj, ʿAyn al-Qużāt also believed in the esoteric meanings of the isolated Qurʾanic letters, and in describing Iblīs, he used some of those esoteric interpretations by personifying the letters:

> Watch out until the [letter] *yā* of the [Qurʾanic verse] "And I have breathed into him My own spirit (*wa nafakhtu fihi min ruḥī*)" (Q 15:29), then the *yā* of the [Qurʾanic verse] "YāSīn. By the wise Qurʾan (*Yā-Sīn wa al-Qurʾan al-ḥakīm*)" (Q 38:1–2) will tell you what the [letter] *yā* of "My curse (*laʿnatī*)" [in the verse "My curse will be upon you" (Q 38:78)] is doing to Iblīs… Swear by the magnificence of the everlasting power [of God] that from pre-existence to eternity (*az azal tā abad*) the [letter] *kāf* of

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[580] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 225.
[581] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 228–29.

> the praise "Peace be upon you (*salāmun alayk*)" [dedicated to Prophet Muḥammad]… does not and will not ever leave Muḥammad for a moment, just as the *yā* of "My curse" (*laʿnatī*) does the same for Iblīs. Do you think if someone's sustenance is taken away from him will he stay alive or survive?... Alas friend! What do you comprehend of the [isolated Qurʾanic letters] "*alif-lām-mīm-rā*"? The [letter] *mīm* is [the path and] disposition (*mashrab*) of Muḥammad, and the [letter] *rā* is [the path and] disposition (*mashrab*) of Iblīs.[582]

ʿAyn al-Qużāt here again equates the rank of Muḥammad and Iblīs by personifying the Qurʾanic verses and especially the letters within those verses that have immense significance for Sufi lettrists. Like al-Ḥallāj, ʿAyn al-Qużāt believed in the occult power of the Qurʾanic letters, especially the famous isolated letters (*ḥurūf muqaṭṭaʿāt*). Here ʿAyn al-Qużāt claims that the duality in which God manifests his contradictory attributes such a kindness (*luṭf*) and severity (*qahr*) are through these Qurʾanic letters and by means of the two figures, Muḥammad and Iblīs. As such, these letters, which are the symbol of divine attributes, are what give spiritual sustenance to these two individuals without which they would cease to survive in their capacity as proselytizers.

In another section of the *Tamḥidāt*, ʿAyn al-Qużāt elucidates the concept of the manifestation of the duality of God's attributes through Muḥammad and Iblīs:

> Have you ever known that God has two [pairs of] names? One is "the Beneficent One, the Merciful One (*al-raḥmān, al-raḥīm*) and the other is "The Forceful One, the Proud One (*al-jabbār, al-mutakabbir*). From the attribute of forcefulness (*ṣifat-i jabbāriyyat*)

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[582] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 225–26.

> He created Iblīs and from the attribute of mercy (*ṣifat-i raḥmāniyyat*) He created Muḥammad. Therefore, mercy became the nourishment (*ghaẕā*) for Muḥammad, and severity and wrath (*qahr va ghażab*) became the nourishment for Iblīs.[583]

The triangular relationship between God, Iblīs, and Muḥammad is also discussed in the way these three share their love. ʿAyn al-Qużāt believed that the sin of Iblīs was that he fell in love with God, while the sin of Muḥammad was the fact that God fell in love with him.[584] For the Sufi seeker, however, there are two beloveds, who according to ʿAyn al-Qużāt are complementary to each other:

> Have you ever seen a person with two beloveds? In such a circumstance he has to watch for one beloved at any time and if he spends time with one of them, the other one will shed his [i.e., lover's] blood. Alas! Have you not been in love with God and Muḥammad, and then Iblīs came along and tempted you… If the cure for this pain is he [i.e., Iblīs], do you think the pain will ever end? Anyone who became half-killed and injured in the universe of Iblīs, will be healed in the Muhammadan universe. For unbelief (*kufr*) [associated with Iblīs] is connected with annihilation (*fanā*), and belief (*imān*) [associated with Muḥammad] is connected with permanence (*baqā*). There is no *baqā* without *fanā*, and the more one reaches the state of *fanā*, the more complete will his *baqā* be.[585]
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> The equality in rank of Muḥammad and Iblīs is explained by an example from another Qurʾanic story, namely the story of Joseph and his brother Benjamin. In that story,

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[583] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 227.
[584] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 229.
[585] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 232–33.

Joseph told Benjamin he was going to pretend to accuse him of stealing his royal cup in front of their other brothers in order to keep him in Egypt with himself. To ʿAyn al-Qużāt, this story reminds him of the story of Iblīs and God:

By His exaltedness, he [i.e., Iblīs] does not do anything, until God, without any intermediary, tells him [i.e., Iblīs] what to do. If you know that the [Qurʾanic verse] "Nor does he speak from [his own] inclination" (Q 53:3) refers to Muḥammad, it is possible to also know [the esoteric interpretation of the Qurʾanic verse] "In their story verily there is a lesson (*ʿibrat*) for men of understanding" (Q 12:111). One of these lessons (*ʿibrat-hā*) is that Benjamin, who was behind the curtain (*darūn-i parda*) along with the people who were also behind the curtain, knew that he did not commit the theft [of the royal cup], but Joseph told him: "When you go outside the curtain say 'I am the thief.'"

Ah! When Gabriel and Michael and other angels heard from the unseen: "Prostrate yourselves before Adam" (Q 7:20), in the unseen of the unseen of the universe of unseen and manifest (*ʿālam al-ghayb va al-shahāda*) God told Iblīs: "Do not prostrate yourself before anyone other than Me (*lā tasjud li-ghayrī*)"… Therefore, he was told in front of everyone: "Prostrate yourself before Adam," but in secret (*dar sirr*) he was told [by God]: "O Iblīs say: 'Should I prostrate myself before the one You created from clay?'" (Q 17:61). This is truly something![586]

ʿAyn al-Qużāt is perhaps the only Sufi who believed that there was complete agreement between God and Iblīs when it came to the latter's refusal and that the two were in cahoots. The similarity

[586] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 226–27.

of the story of Joseph and Benjamin to the story of God and Iblīs is the best evidence of such a cosmic stage play. He elucidates this point further in one of his letters:

> O Friend! Do you want to know what God told Iblīs secretly behind the curtain when Adam, [the archangels] Gabriel or Michael were not present? I do not dare to divulge it except in metaphor!... Nay! Nay! I will say it clearly and I shall not be afraid!... Joseph told Benjamin whatever [secret] he told him behind the curtain and outside the curtain they accused him of stealing and defamed him in both worlds, and Benjamin was content (*rāżī*) with all of this. Beware! "In Joseph and his brothers there are signs for those who inquire" (Q 12:7). It [i.e., the story of Joseph] is "The best of all stories (*aḥsan al-qiṣaṣ*)" but you only heard fables (*afsāna*) from it. Stay until Benjamin secretly tells you what they have told Iblīs behind the curtain and why his face was blackened in public and why God said: "My curse will be upon you" (Q 38:78) while he was content and recited:
>
> I have a soul which bears the burden of Your love
> I will not escape until I sacrifice it for Your sake.
>
> He [i.e., Iblīs] does not think of anyone else [except God].[587]

As for the issue of jealousy, ʿAyn al-Qużāt explains that it was a station that God had personally demanded Iblīs to have:

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[587] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 188–89.

God chose Iblīs as the gatekeeper of His Lordship's exaltedness (*darbānī-yi ḥażrat-ʿizzat*) and told him: "You are my lover. Have jealousy (*ghayrat*) at My gate and keep strangers away from My presence and tell them:

> The Beloved told me: 'Sit at front of the gate
> Do not let any person who does not belong to me.
>
> Tell whoever wants me to become unreasoned (*bīkhud*)
> This [task] is not intended for anyone except me."[588]

ʿAyn al-Qużāt believed that the Sufi lover must sometimes follow Iblīs, in the sense that in order to get closer to God one had to disobey His commandment. This kind of disobedience was justified and is at the heart of understanding the enigma of Iblīs. The true lover must be able to discern between the commandment (*farmān*) and the intention and will (*irādat*) of the Beloved and only act on the *irādat* even if it is contrary to the *farmān*:

> O Friend! I swear by His exaltedness and majesty that for some years it has occurred to me why no creature is fit to say the name of God! But this is a commandment (*farmān*). A group [of Sufis] (*qaum*) saw His intention (*irādat*) and they abandoned His commandment. What do you hear? I have written it again and I know that you still do not grasp it. The commandment of the Beloved is one thing and his intention is another. From time to time, the commandment of the Beloved works as a touchstone (*miḥakk*) which reveals the fineness of the essence of the lover (*ʿayār-i nahād-i ʿāshiq*); if the lover obeys the commandment, it shows that he is still crude and raw (*nā-pukhta*) but if he disobeys it shows [his] perfection. [589]

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[588] Hamadānī, *Tamhīdāt*, 228–29.
[589] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 1:95.

In one of his letters, he expounds on this concept further:

> The pupil must have the qualities of Iblīs (*Iblīs ṣifat*) in order to have something good come out of him. To lose oneself in the *farmān* is one thing and to lose oneself in the *irādat* of the Beloved is another… O chivalrous one! The *farmān* is exoteric and *irādat* is esoteric.[590]

He then explains that based on this theory, Iblīs was the most mature lover of God:

> Have you not seen, O friend, that anyone who knows the *irādat* of his Friend and Beloved, in order to fulfill His *irādat*, disobeys His *farmān*. What do you hear? Iblīs was informed of God's *irādat* that He did not want him to prostrate himself [before Adam]. When God said: "Prostrate yourselves before Adam" (Q 2:34) that was the touchstone (*miḥakk*) to see who will obey his *farmān* and prostate himself before someone other than Him. All the angels prostrated themselves except the teacher of the angels. This was befitting because the master must be wiser (*pukhta-tar*) than the pupil…. He chose separation from the Beloved instead of prostrating himself before another. What a mature and perfect love! "[His] eye did not swerve, nor did it transgress" (Q 53:17).[591]

As indicated earlier in al-Ḥallāj's writing, the Qurʾanic verse at the end of this segment was interpreted by the exegetes to refer to the Prophet Muḥammad when he was on his *miʿrāj*. Qurʾan exegetes indicated that when the Prophet reached God's throne, he did not pay attention to anything except God, and this verse "[His] eye did not swerve, nor did it transgress" (Q 53:17) is God's

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[590] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 1:75.
[591] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 1:96.

confirmation of that event. Yet here, in a very controversial interpretation, ʿAyn al-Qużāt relates this verse to Iblīs. His reasoning is that when God told all the angels to prostrate themselves before Adam, Iblīs was the only one mature enough and also so mesmerized by the beauty of God that not only did he refuse to prostrate himself, but his eyes were fixed on the beauty of the Beloved and nothing else, and that made him the lover par excellence.

ʿAyn al-Qużāt makes a distinction between Shayṭān and Iblīs in the sense that when he speaks of a religious sin, he sometimes attributes it to Shayṭān or *shayāṭīn*, but not to Iblīs, who never provokes humans to be sinful.[592]

> Do you know [who] Iblīs [really] is? He is a proselytizer in God's way, but he proselytizes people away from Him. The Prophet Muḥammad proselytizes people to Him. God['s] everlasting majestic attributes (*jalālat*) assigned Iblīs for this task…. O friend! I have been thrown into another realm [of thought] and I cannot delve into such matters for fear that I may lose t control of my pen; whatever cannot be put to pen is better to be left unwritten.[593]

The path that Iblīs chose in displaying his love for God is quite different from the rest of the lovers of God. Like al-Ḥallāj, ʿAyn al-Qużāt also discusses the mystical concepts of nearness (*qurb*) and farness (*buʿd*) and states that there are a small group of mystics who seek nearness to God by getting far from Him:

> There are those [Sufi] men who in their state of farness (*buʿd*) [from God] tread the path of nearness (*qurb*) [to God]. For them it is impossible to tread the path of *qurb*

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[592] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 1:12–14, 82.
[593] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 1:304.

except by being in the state of *buʿd*. Most people are ignorant of that. Iblīs is one of these [Sufi] men, and in the world there are few who can comprehend this because few can reach such a station (*maqām*)…. It was not befitting the munificence of God to close the path and the gate of *qurb* to him. Attaining such a state is not possible except by attaining perfect mystical knowledge (*maʿrifat bi-kamāl*). The result of this [attainment of perfection for Iblīs] was to be drowned in the ocean of the Beloved. That is why [God] said [to Iblīs]: "Then get out of it, for indeed, you are expelled. And indeed, upon you is My curse" (Q 38:77–78). What a strange saying! I did not know that he [i.e., Iblīs] will be nourished by it [i.e., the curse]. The hymn (*tasbīḥ*) of the lover here is this:

That knowledge which I learned from You
I keep in my heart even though it is setting my heart ablaze.

With this hymn he will tread the path of *qurb* under the guise of separation. The [Sufi concept of] poverty which you have heard is this one.

Whoever comes to pass him by from among the seekers of God he will talk to them and he swears (*saugand khurad*) and he will be truthful; "And he swore to them: 'Truly, I am for you a sincere adviser'" (Q 7:21). [Iblīs will say to them:] "You have been told to walk the path of *qurb* [and also] 'Therefore flee toward God' (Q 51:50) and do not walk the path of *buʿd*! "But do not approach this tree, lest you be among the wrongdoers (Q 2:35)." But hear [the truth] from me: To tread the path of *qurb* is to suffer needlessly; and *buʿd* after *qurb* is the inescapable tradition of God"… this is the advice of Iblīs.[594]

[594] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 1:313–14

ʿAyn al-Qużāt realized that the Sufi who is on the path and endeavors to attain the highest of stations must listen to Iblīs's advice and go beyond it. Envisioning an enigmatic journey for the seeker, ʿAyn al-Qużāt states:

> How can Iblīs not give advice, he who was nourished by [God's] munificence, was an intimate companion of God, was the master of angels, had his Sufi lodge (*zāviya*) in front of God's throne (*ʿarsh*), and God talked to him directly and without intermediary and he was one of the pre-eternal selects... If the *sālik*s listen to him, he will get to them according to the [Qurʾanic verse] "So he led them on by delusion" (Q 7:22). Because in giving advice, Iblīs is treading his own path of *qurb*, but for the *sālik* the path of *qurb* is that he should not listen to Iblīs, for if he listens, in accordance to the [Qurʾanic verse] "God will lead astray whomever he wills" (Q 13:27) his path will be barred…. When he [i.e., the *sālik*] finally reaches the station (*maqām*) of Iblīs, a Sufi lodge will be made for him at the foot of God's throne. If he gets there through the same path as Iblīs, when he reaches that *maqām*, he should affirm the advice of Iblīs because now he is the possessor of discernment (*ṣāḥib ẕauq*), because before that he was just an imitator (*muqallid*). However, more often it is the case that Iblīs does not lead one to this station because his path is the path of *buʿd*… It is impossible that a *sālik* understands this in the realm of science and intellect. However, if there is a *sālik* who is more resolved and whose endeavors are more determined than that of Iblīs, this *sālik* will definitely meet Iblīs on the path and then pass him by. Then Iblīs will say "This man's kilim is blacker than mine."[595]

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[595] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 1:314–15

This is one of the ways in which one can reach the stage that is beyond Iblīs, and that stage is poverty (*faqr*) to reach which will be an immense privilege according to ʿAyn al-Qużāt, and it is only reached by the seeker after he falls in love with God and God falls in love with him. As ʿAyn al-Qużāt explains:

> After all that, the [stage] of *faqr* manifests itself to you and blackens your face, and banishes you like an exile from God's presence; it is then that you realize who Iblīs really is: he is the one who has been exiled (*mahjūr*) for several thousand years and yet he keeps company with that [divine] threshold.[596]

In one of his letters (# 107), ʿAyn al-Qużāt depicts the path to Iblīs in such an enthusiastic and eloquent way that the reader may mistake it for the description of the path to God:

> Stay until your eyes are opened to the beauty of the Eternal One. Then you become nurtured by the amorous gesture and coquetry (*nāz va kirishma*) of that beauty and you become [spiritually] fattened (*farba gardī*) by the constant union [with God]. After that, little by little, you are taken from the realm of [the prophetic *hadith* which states] "Sometimes I perceive a veil over my heart," and you are taken to the realm of veiling [like the maxim] "It is difficult to be weaned after the attachment." Then you reach the stage of separation and see the face of the exile. It is only then that you will be able to grasp the scent of the magnificent fortune of Iblīs.[597]

ʿAyn al-Qużāt encourages Sufis to know Iblīs and to view him with their eye of the heart:

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[596] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 2:160.
[597] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 2: 416–17.

> O brother! Beware! It should never cross your mind that Iblīs fell out of love with God. Although he stepped into the realm of *qahr*, his face was turned completely toward the magnificence and exaltedness of God [to which he swore] "By Your exaltedness I will lead them all astray" (Q 38: 82).[598]

In another place he says that while ordinary men eat stuffed chicken and stews for dinner, the true men's [i.e., the Sufis'] stew is affliction and pain and suffering, and they stand at Iblīs's gate for this kind of breakfast and dinner every day.[599]

The praise that ʿAyn al-Qużāt has for Iblīs is unique in all of Persian literature. In one letter he states:

> In all existence if anyone should become wise enough to understand the story of Iblīs, that person by virtue of knowing his secrets becomes extremely exalted and dear. However, it is the case that in a thousand years not one iota of his strange secrets has been revealed. That one unequaled in existence (*yigāna-yi vujūd*), that chief of the exiled ones (*sarvar-i mahjūrān*), that secret of predestination (*sirr-i qadar*), that beauty mark on the face of the Eternal one, that jealous one of the realm (*ghayūr-i mamlakat*) was the one whom Shaykh Abū al-Qāsim Gurgānī called the master of masters (*khʷāja-yi khʷājagān*).[600]

ʿAyn al-Qużāt was not even sure if his friends could understand the truth about the magnificence of Iblīs:

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[598] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 2: 416
[599] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 2: 410.
[600] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 2:416.

> Do I have any friend who can truly understand and discuss some of the discourse about Iblīs? Who is capable of discussing and hearing it? How could common people ever understand such discourse about him when the select of the select one (*khavāsṣ-i khavāsṣ*) cannot even comprehend the scent of the dust on which he trod. Have you heard that he was the master of the angels and his Sufi lodge was for several thousand years at the foot of God's throne? Do you presume this is a small feat? This is the same Iblīs whose affair commenced with such greatness. Now his state is such that he has become the plaything of kids in the street. Read this letter a thousand times and memorize it.[601]

To ʿAyn al-Qużāt, these qualities made Iblīs the master worth following. His own masters, like Aḥmad Ghazālī and Shaykh Baraka, had tremendous reverence for him, and some of the greatest Sufis of the past, chief among them al-Ḥallāj, viewed him as the manifestation of the Divine in the universe.

In his article "Devil's Advocate: ʿAyn al-Quḍāt's Defence of Iblis in Context," Muḥammad Rustom briefly discusses several issues that have been examined here, although his approach to ʿAyn al-Qużāt Iblisology is from a philosophical point of view from which he tries to explain, among other things, the problem of theodicy. While Rustom rightly notes that ʿAyn al-Qużāt's Iblisology is directly connected to his Sufism and not his philosophical and theological worldviews, he claims that "with respect to his Satanology, it would be quite incorrect to say that some of ʿAyn al-Quḍāt's philosophical and theological ideas find their perfect analogue in his

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[601] Hamadānī, *Nāmahā*, 2:417.

Satanology."[602] Establishing the veracity of such a claim is difficult because what Rustom calls the theological and philosophical views of ʿAyn al-Qużāt are so intertwined with his mystical and Sufi worldview that any attempt to separate them would result in an incoherent analysis of his ideas with respect to Iblīs. Rustom's oversight on this matter stems from the fact that he fails to notice that the Arabic writings of ʿAyn al-Qużāt, in which he deals largely with philosophical and theological issues, are devoid of any positive references to Iblīs. Even when he wrote his retractive apologia *Shakwā al-gharīb*, in which he defended himself against the accusations of heresy, there is not a single positive reference to Iblīs. That was no accident. ʿAyn al-Qużāt expressed his most controversial and heterodox ideas, including his Iblisography, in Persian rather than in Arabic, perhaps with the hope that they would be read by a smaller group of like-minded mystics and hence would cause him less trouble in Baghdadi theological circles. Finally, Rustom overlooks the great influence that Hallajian Iblisology had on ʿAyn al-Qużāt who became its most eloquent exegete.

One final note about ʿAyn al-Qużāt's Iblisology is the fact that he makes a clear distinction between Iblīs and Shayṭān a point that Nicholas Boylston fails to make in his dissertation.[603] In ʿAyn al-Qużāt's writings there are numerous references to Satan (Shayṭān) or evil action (*shāyṭānī*) which are always associated with negative traits. Yet one can almost never find anything negative associated with Iblīs in ʿAyn al-Qużāt's Persian writings.

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[602] Muhammad Rustom, "Devil's Advocate: ʿAyn al-Quḍāt's Defence of Iblis in Context," *Studia Islamica* 115, no.1 (2020): 91.

[603] Nicholas Boylston, "Writing the Kaleidoscope of Reality, the Significance of Diversity in 6th/12th Century Persian Metaphysical Literature: Sanāʾī, ʿAyn al-Quḍāt and ʿAṭṭār" (PhD diss. Georgetown University, 2017), 325.

4.6 Conclusion

From the ninth to the twelfth century, the enigmatic tales about Iblīs attracted an array of thinkers and authors. Iblīs was the first creature to be banished from God's presence. While theologians assumed that Iblīs was jealous of God's decision to make Adam His vicegerent on earth, and that Iblīs's refusal to prostrate himself before Adam was out of haughtiness and jealousy, a group of Persian Sufis challenged this notion and interpreted his story in a completely different light. According to their interpretation, Iblīs chose to be the first to be banished because he knew that it was through the pain and suffering of exile that he could aspire to be the kind of mature lover who was worthy of God's love. This was, according to them, also God's plan for him. This secret mission made him the mightiest of all mystics in the eyes of these Sufis, who elevated him above the rank of the archangel Gabriel as well as the ranks of the prophets, and equated his rank only to that of the Prophet Muḥammad. This model of pain and suffering on the path of the Beloved was adopted by those hardcore Iblisophile Sufis, culminating in the martyrdom of two of Iblīs's greatest advocates, namely al-Ḥallāj and ʿAyn al-Qużāt.

While al-Ḥallāj and ʿAyn al-Qużāt lived some two centuries apart, it appears that they shared the same vision of Iblīs. Their ideas about Iblīs were not created ex nihilo, as they had a long chain of masters and colleagues who, to varying degrees, were also Iblisophiles. It is safe to assume that when it came to interpreting and expounding on the cryptic and esoteric writings of al-Ḥallāj, ʿAyn al-Qużāt remains the best interpreter of Hallajian Iblisology. Many of the themes that both these authors used included employing the lettrist hermeneutic in interpreting Qurʾanic verses, such as Q 38:78–82, to describe the mutual love between God and Iblīs. There is also the emphasis on the high rank of both Muḥammad and Iblīs as two equal but opposite emanations of the divine essence, and finally the Iblīs's love for God which manifests itself through the esoteric

interstation of God's curse upon Iblīs. These are all indications that for many Iblisophile Sufis. and for these two authors in particular, Iblīs remained the focal point of their mystical aspiration and the greatest source of spiritual emulation. To al-Ḥallāj and ʿAyn al-Qużāt, Iblīs was not only the master of the angels, but also the master of all the Sufis whose ears were attuned to his esoteric and unconventional messages. This made him the perfect example of a mythical figure who, instead of just talking about antinomian ideas such as *kufr*, love, and *tauḥīd*, he acted upon them. In doing so he lost everything but remained content.

Chapter 5

Iblīs in Classical Persian Poetry

5.1 Iblīs in the Early Persian Poetry

References to Iblīs were few in the tenth century, which marked the rise of classical Persian poetry. One of the earliest poets who repeatedly mentioned Iblīs in his poems was Abū al-Qāsim Firdausī (d. ca. 410/1020), who became the most celebrated poet in Persian literature for his versification of the Iranian national epic, *Shāh-nāma*. In it Iblīs is generally depicted as a negative figure. His most prominent role is in the mythical section of the *Shāh-nāma,* particularly in the story of the king Żaḥḥāk, whom he led astray on several occasion. Abū Ḥasan Farrukhī Sīstānī (d. ca. 429/1037), who was one of the early Persian poets at the Ghaznavid court, composed a panegyric to celebrate the appointment of Abū ʿAlī Ḥasan b. Muḥammad Mīkāyilī, known as Ḥasanak-I Vazīr (d. 423/1032), to the position of vizier of Sultan Maḥmūd of Ghazna (d. 421/1030). In it, he praised the qualities of Ḥasanak-i Vazīr and stated that the only defect that his detractors could ascribe to him was that he was not old enough. Farrukhī then refuted the notion of equating wisdom with old age:

> Iblīs was old; reflect on what he had done,
> He chose blazing Hellfire over sublime Paradise.[604]

While this put into question the sagacity of Iblīs, the fact that according to the poet Iblīs "chose" Hell over Paradise hinted that Iblīs was well aware of the consequences of his choices.

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[604] Abū al-Ḥasan Farrukhī Sīstānī, *Dīvān*, ed. ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Rasūlī (Tehran: Majlis, 1311/1932), pp. 191–92, line 26.

Perhaps the first Persian poet who expressed ambiguity and a degree of sympathy toward Iblīs's plight was Abū al-Muʿīn Nāṣir ibn Khusrau Qubādiyānī (d. ca. 471/1078), better known as Nāṣir-i Khusrau. He was a high-ranking Shia Ismāʿīlī missionary (*dāʿī*) whose poetry, written exclusively in Persian, reflected his religious worldview.[605] In one of the *qaṣīda*s in his *Dīvān,* while discussing the Divine attributes, he described the feebleness of the human intellect in comprehending the secrets of creation and the universe:

> First know your own existence well and then
> Turn away from this revolving firmament and from this dusty little plaything (i.e., the world).
>
> So long as within your imagination Iblīs has drawn the sword in battle with Adam
> How can you know the Divine secrets (*asrār-i ilāhi*)?
>
> You see the spiritual matter (*maʿnā*) the same way a blind man eyes sees the shape and color of the rose in the life-giving garden.[606]

According to Nāṣir-i Khusrau, understanding the secrets of the spiritual universe requires a spiritual aptitude beyond the intellectual rigours of a learned man. As demonstrated in this *qaṣīda*, one of those Divine secrets was the relationship between Adam and Iblīs—which the Muslim exegetes assumed to be based on jealousy and animosity. Nāṣir-i Khusrau, on the other hand, invited the select reader to look at that relationship esoterically, because only then could the essence of the Divine secret be comprehended. He then chastised the average reader for being oblivious to the realm of spiritual realities (*maʿnā*) and compared him to a blind man in the rose garden. When he reached the realm where his inner vision opened up to the Divine secrets, he no longer saw Iblīs and Adam in conflict, but as part of the great scheme of things designed by God.

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[605] *Encyclopædia Iranica.* s.v. "Ismaʿilism 13: Ismaʿili literature in Persian and Arabic."

[606] Ḥakīm Abū al-Muʿīn Ḥamid al-Dīn Nāṣir ibn Khusrau Qubādiyānī (Nāṣir-i Khusrau), *Dīvan-i ashʿār*, ed. Mujtabā Mīnuvī and Mahdī Muḥaqqiq (Tehran: Muʾassasa-yi Muṭālaʿāt-i Islāmī, Dānishgāh-i Makgīl, Shuʾba-yi Tihrān, 1357/1978), vol. 1, no.1, lines 31–33, p. 3.

By the time the mystical poetry gained prominence in the Persian literature, the poets had many rhetorical devices at their disposal. Key among those literary devices was the use of *īhām* (equivoque) where the author used a single word with a double meaning, one obvious and close (*qarīb*) and the other unusual and far-fetched (*gharīb*).[607] The general audience could understand the *qarīb* meaning, while the *gharīb* meaning provides a more significant interpretation for the perceptive audience.[608] For the mystical poets who needed to convey the esoteric concepts only to their targeted audience, *īhām* was the perfect literary medium.

In the realm of mystical poetry, Abū al-Majd Majdūd ibn Ādam Sanāʾī Ghaznavī (d. ca. 535/1141), was a forerunner in raising thought-provoking questions about the culpability of Iblīs. In a *qaṣīda* similarly themed to that of Nāṣir Khusrau, after praising the attributes of God, Sanāʾī raised the age-old question of Adam's sin and the issue of the "Devil." He asked:

> How did Adam eat the grain of wheat in the Garden
> while no bread-eating person yet existed there.
>
> He should have had wheat
> Only after he stepped out of the Garden.
>
> Adam witnessed this conundrum completely
> Iblīs [on the other hand] was not born of any mother
>
> What is your opinion about his refusal to prostrate himself?
> Did he have a choice or was he compelled?
>
> If he was able [to refuse God's command, then] God was powerless (*ʿājiz*)
> If he was incapable (i.e., predestined or compelled to refuse), then God is a tyrant (*sitamgar*).
>
> Do not ponder that which is not your business
> And do not tread the path that is not yours.[609]

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[607] *Encyclopædia Iranica*, s.v. "Ihām."

[608] *Encyclopædia Iranica*, s.v. "Ihām."

[609] Ḥakīm Abū al-Majd Majdūd b. Ādam Sanāʾī Ghaznavī. *Dīvān-i Sanāʾī Ghaznavī*, ed. Muḥammad Taqī Mudarris Rażavī (repr., Tehran, Sanāyī, 1380/2001), lines 26–31, p. 271–72. It is noteworthy that this *qaṣīda* is also attributed to Nāṣir-i Khusrau. See Nāṣir-i Khusrau, *Dīvān*, vol. 1, no. 113, lines 26–31, pp. 236–37.

While these questions had been circulating since the ninth century, especially among the skeptics or refuters, such as the Zoroastrian polemicist Mardānfarrox ī Ohrmazddātān, the author of *Škand Gomānic Vīčār* (The doubt-dispelling exposition), for a Muslim mystic to ponder such controversial issues demonstrates that the conventional narrative about Iblīs was not fully accepted even among Muslims. Sanāʾī brought up this issue close to the end of his *qaṣīda*, suggesting that while he was impressed by God's unique attributes, there nevertheless remained some lingering theological quandaries. He began his question with Adam eating the forbidden fruit, but then a more pressing issue emerged in his mind and that was the question of the culpability of Iblīs. It is not clear why Sanāʾī stated that "Iblīs was not born of any mother." If this means that nothing gave birth to Iblīs then was Sanāʾī indicating that Iblīs was not a created being but existed since pre-eternity (*azal*)? More importantly, Sanāʾī brought up the question of compulsion versus free will (*jabr wa ikhtiyār*), which is a never-ending Islamic theological dilemma of whether God created humans free or predetermined human destiny. However, in this *qaṣīda*, Sanāʾī raised that question in relation to Iblīs's refusal to prostrate himself before Adam. He asserted that if God was unable to stop Iblīs from refusing, then He was powerless (*ʿājiz*); but if Iblīs was predestined by God to refuse His command, then God was a tyrant (*sitamgar*) for causing the fall of one of his most diligent servants.

By Sanāʾī's time, such theological questions were prevalent amongst the Persian religious intelligentsia. Yet Sanāʾī went beyond asking a controversial question. In one *ghazal*, he spoke in place of Iblīs, explaining his spiritual inspiration and tribulations. While the attribution of this ghazal to Sanāʾī is questionable, scholars such as Shafīʿī Kadkanī propose that since this *ghazal*

shows up in numerous manuscripts of Sanāʾī's *Divān,* his authorship of it should be accepted.[610] If we do, it would be the earliest extant classical Persian poem which sympathizes with Iblīs's plight. In it Iblīs begins by describing his relationship with God:

On account of love and friendship, my heart was in union with Him
The Sīmurgh of love had built a nest in my heart

At my gate there was an army of angels
The lofty throne [of God] was the threshold of my rank.

He (i.e., God) secretly laid for me His trap of cunningness (*dām-i makr*)
In the middle of that trap Adam was the bait.

He (i.e., God) willed to mark me with His curse
He did what He wanted, and Adam, who was [made] out of clay, was an excuse.

I was a teacher in the angelic realm (*malakūt*) of the heavens
My hope in residing eternally in the Paradise was perpetual.

I spent seven hundred thousand years in prayer
There were thousands upon thousands of treasure houses filled with my prayers.

I had read in the celestial Tablet that someone will become cursed
I suspected anyone but myself.

Adam was [created] from earth and I was [created] from His pure light
I thought I was unique, but in reality He was.

The angels said: "You did not prostrate yourself!"
How could I do it when He had such an affair with me?

O dear one, come and do not rely on your prayers
This verse must be taken as an admonishment for the people of the time.

I found out that what had befallen me was on account of predestination
A hundred springs of water flow from that time from my eyes.

O prudent ones, there is no blame for my love
Because without His consent, no one can find a path to Him.[611]

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[610] Muḥammad Riżā Shafīʿī Kadkanī, *Dar iqlīm-i raushanāyī: Sharḥ-i chand ghazal az ḥakīm Sanāʾī Ghaznavī* (Tehran: Āgah, 1385/2007), 207–8.

[611] Sanāʾī, *Dīvān*, no. 129, pp. 871–72.

As the first *ghazal* in Persian poetry that describes Iblīs's fall from grace from his own perspective, this poem forms a bridge between the non-apologetic stance of Iblīs in the writings of al-Ḥallāj and ʿAyn al-Qużāt, and what came after in the poetry of ʿAṭṭār and Rūmī that portrayed Iblīs as a remorseful lover who, while bemoaning his fate, was at the same time assured of his deliverance. The *ghazal* starts with Iblīs's confessing his love for God while reminding the reader of his celestial status, yet it also refers to God's cunningness and how He entrapped him. Like some of the previous Iblisophile Sufis, Sanāʾī realized that God was simply using Iblīs's refusal as an excuse to curse him. Then there is the reference to the legend of the celestial Tablet (*lauḥ*) in which the destiny of all creations has been inscribed, and how Iblīs saw in it that there was someone who was going to be cursed. Although this story is mentioned in al-Ḥallāj's *Kitāb al-Ṭawāsīn*, this was the first time that it was mentioned in Persian literature.

Sanāʾī depicts Iblīs as a tragic lover whose years of service and prayer did not prevent him from falling from grace. Therefore, it is a cautionary tale for all the so-called "prudent ones" (*ʿāqilān*) who assume their piety will save them from the "cunningness" (*makr*) of God. The themes used by Sanāʾī in this *ghazal* became a roadmap for Persian mystical poets such as ʿAṭṭār and Rūmī to expand upon this image of Iblīs as a tragic lover.

5.2 ʿAṭṭār's Portrayal of the Sorrowful Iblīs

Farīd al-Dīn Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad ʿAṭṭār Nīshābūrī (d. ca. 618/1221), one of the most celebrated Persian mystical poets, also happened to be an Iblisophile Sufi. He produced several works of mystical poetry that had a tremendous influence on the development of Persian mystical

literature, especially the works of Rūmī. There is a progression in the way the character of Iblīs developed in ʿAṭṭār's oeuvre.

5.2.1 *Asrār-nāma*

Although ʿAṭṭār was sympathetic to the fate of Iblīs, his portrayal of Iblīs in his earliest work, the *Asrār-nāma*, is more in line with mainstream theological sources. ʿAṭṭār brought up Iblīs's name in the first section of the *Asrār-nāma* while describing God's independence (*istighnā*) from His creation:

> Look at Iblīs, who for thousands of years
> Had nothing to do but praise and glorify God
>
> All his prayers were assembled
> And thrown to the wind on account of God's *istighnā*
>
> His bloodied heart became the place of suffering
> His body became the napkin for the feast of accursedness.[612]

The image of Iblīs that ʿAṭṭār presents in the *Asrār-nāma* is not completely in accord with the general views of Iblisophile Sufis. One great difference is that ʿAṭṭār's Iblīs is the embodiment of a tragic lover who is melancholy on account of the pain of separation from his Beloved. The last verse in particular emphasizes how Iblīs became the embodiment of this melancholy in which his heart and body became like a unworthy napkin, soiled and stained with accursedness. Yet in the same introduction, ʿAṭṭār indicates that if Iblīs acquired even one iota of God's mercy, he would surpass the rank of Idrīs (Enoch).[613] Here, ʿAṭṭār plays on the orthography of the two names,

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[612] Farīd al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm ʿAṭṭār Nīshābūrī, *Asrār-nāma*, ed. Muḥammad Riżā Shafīʿī Kadkanī (Tehran: Sukhan, 1387/2008), p. 91, lines 96–98.

[613] ʿAṭṭār, *Asrār-nāma*, p. 91, lines 116.

namely "Iblīs" and "Idrīs," to demonstrate that the difference between the two is simply the matter of God's favor to one and disfavor to another. Nevertheless, in the *Asrār-nāma* Iblīs remains mainly a negative figure.

5.2.2 *Ilāhī-nāma*

In the *Ilāhī-nāma*, which is ʿAṭṭār's second poetic work, Iblīs is also mentioned repeatedly, and although he is mostly portrayed in a negative light, there are tales and stories in which ʿAṭṭār appears to sympathize with his pain. One such story is about a conversation between the Sufi Dhū al-Nūn Miṣrī (d. ca. 245/859) and Iblīs. It was first told in a little-known early Sufi work called *Raunaq al-majālis* by Abū Ḥafṣ ʿUmar ibn Ḥasan Samarqandī (d. ca. 372/983) in which Dhū al-Nūn states:

> I was walking along a road when I saw a stream of water different from ordinary water flowing between two rocks. I walked upstream until I reached a cave. There I saw Iblīs sitting on a rock and weeping. I said to him: "What is the meaning of this weeping?" He answered: "O Dhū al-Nūn, why should I not weep? No one has more reason to weep than I do. Earlier, I used to bring people to God. Then He banished me and cursed me." I asked: "Why did you abandon His command?" He answered: "I would not have expected such words from you! No [Divine] favor (*ʿināyat*) existed in my affair."[614]

ʿAṭṭār reiterates this story in the *Ilāhī-nāma* as follows:

> That unique one (i.e., Dhū al-Nūn Miṣrī) said: "Once, on the road to the desert,
> I saw two streams of black water flowing.

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[614] ʿUmar ibn al-Ḥasan Abū Ḥafṣ al-Samarqandī, *Mukhtaṣar Raunaq al-majālis*. comp. ʿUthmān ibn Yaḥyā ibn ʿAbd al-Wahhāb al-Mīrī (Cairo: Maṭbaʿa al-Mymanīya, 1322/1904), 22.

I followed the head of the stream to see what kind of water it was—
That was gushing with speed

Finally, when I reached a stone
I saw Iblīs fallen on the ground.

His eyes were like two blood-raining clouds
From each eye a stream of blood was flowing.

He cried like rain and
Kept saying this continually:

"This affair is not because of that face which is like the moon
But it is because the color of my kilim is black.

He does not want my prayers
That is why I was blamed for the sin [of rebellion]."

To whom else had such a thing befallen?
No one else can imagine anything like this.[615]

Aside from rendering it in poetic form, ʿAṭṭār introduces several new elements into the story. He does not explicitly state that it was Dhū al-Nūn who told the story; rather he refers to him as "that unique one" (*ān yigāna*), assuming that readers are familiar with the story. In ʿAṭṭār's version, when Dhū al-Nūn saw Iblīs, it was not water, but blood, that fell from his eyes; as a standard topos in Persian poetry, this is indicative of Iblīs's immense love for God. Unlike Samarqandī's version, in ʿAṭṭār's rendition, Iblīs was not directly complaining about losing his status or being cursed, nor was he blaming God for what had befallen him. Instead, like a mature lover, he defended his "moon-faced Beloved" and blamed his own fate. Most importantly, ʿAṭṭār uses the image of the 'black kilim' (*gilim-i siyāh*), which had been used by ʿAyn al-Qużāt to symbolize Iblīs's destiny. The difference is that whereas ʿAyn al-Qużāt believed that Iblīs was proud of his black kilim, in

[615] Farīd al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm ʿAṭṭār Nīshābūrī, *Ilāhī-nāma*, ed. Muḥammad Riżā Shafīʿī Kadkanī, 5th ed. (Tehran: Sukhan, 1388/2009), p. 212, lines 2286–93.

ʿAṭṭār's poem, the black kilim symbolizes Iblīs's unfortunate destiny. In this poem, ʿAṭṭār reiterates what many Iblisophile Sufis before him indicated, that is, at least on an exoteric level, it was God who no longer wanted Iblīs as his servant, and Iblīs's refusal to prostrate himself was simply a pretext. In the end, ʿAṭṭār reminds the reader that Iblīs was unique in his relationship with God and no one can fathom his experience. Since the poem starts with a reference to "that unique one" and ends with depicting Iblīs as a unique being, this was perhaps meant to indicate that the plight of Iblīs could be understood only by those who have suffered his pain (i.e., Sufis).

After this initial story about Iblīs, ʿAṭṭār relates a series of seemingly unrelated stories and then makes a connection between these stories and the way Iblīs viewed his situation. In the first, he provides the example of Joseph and Benjamin and how Joseph devised a ruse, feigning to accuse Benjamin of stealing his royal cup in order to keep his brother in Egypt. Again, the idea was borrowed from ʿAyn al-Qużāt, who appears to have used it for the first time in the context of the God-Iblīs relationship. ʿAṭṭār states:

> A great man (i.e., a Sufi) once said: "When Joseph
> Wanted to reveal his heart to Benjamin
>
> To become of one heart with him in sincerity
> And make him his special companion in private,
>
> He put his royal cup in Benjamin's sack
> And accused him of thievery; What an act!"
>
> That great man of religion said:
> "This, verily, was exactly the same thing that happened to Iblīs.
>
> He was banished [by God] from His presence and to keep this secret
> By cursing him, God made him unique (*mumtāz*) in all the universe.
>
> He (i.e., God) dressed him in the robe of His severity (*qahr*) because
> God wanted to conceal him (i.e., Iblīs) in *qahr* from the view of the common people.

He (i.e., Iblīs) is constantly standing(*istādast payvast*) at God's gate/ He is a permanent master (*ustādast payvast*) at God's gate
He holds a weapon [made out] of *qahr* in his hand.

If at first you do not ask for refuge from him,
You cannot take a step toward the Divine.

He is constantly standing at God's gate day and night
So that he can dismiss the unworthy ones

The touchstone of every man's (i.e., Sufi's) currency (*naqd*) is in his hands
From east to west, everyone is standing in his line.

Anyone who brings counterfeit currency there
In an instant will be struck by Iblīs's blade.

Iblīs will say to the owner of that [counterfeit] currency:
'O you who have surpassed me in mischief

In half an hour God had thrown at my face
Thousands of years of prayers.

You became haughty from this little amount of prayers
And you are bringing this to God? Have you no shame?

If all of creation should curse me
The love for my Beloved does not decrease even an iota'."[616]

In a few verses ʿAṭṭār not only combined several Iblisographical ideas that were raised by ʿAyn al-Qużāt, but also went beyond the latter's original message. ʿAṭṭār states that Joseph wanted to "become of one heart" with Benjamin (*bi-dil bā ū yakī gardad*). In this comparison in which Joseph stands for God and Benjamin for Iblīs, it appears that ʿAṭṭār is indicating that it was God who was seeking to "become of one heart" with Iblīs. Yet the way God sought this was to dress Iblīs in the robe of His severity (*qahr*) by cursing him and thus cloaking him from the eyes of commoners. In other words, God's *qahr* was a ruse to conceal His love for Iblīs. Just as Joseph acted toward

[616] ʿAṭṭār, *Ilāhī-nāma*, p. 212–13, lines 2297–308.

Benjamin, God wanted to keep Iblīs only for Himself. Obviously for Sufis who consider themselves the select (*khavāṣṣ*), this concealment did not work, and they recognized Iblīs as the celestial saint who was set apart (*mumtāz*) from the rest of creation by being cursed by God.

ʿAṭṭār borrowed many ideas from ʿAyn al-Qużāt in this section of the *Ilāhī-nāma*, so one may assume with a certain degree of confidence that when he refers to "that great man of religion," he meant ʿAyn al-Qużāt.[617] Among the concepts borrowed from him is the representation of Iblīs as God's gatekeeper whose weapon according to ʿAṭṭār is the weapon of *qahr*, and that he only lets through the worthy ones. The use of *īhām* for the word standing/master (*istādast*/*ustādast*) is also noteworthy. ʿAṭṭār also alludes to the fact that every time a person reads the Qurʾan, before he can recite the obligatory formula "In the name of God, the Gracious the Merciful," he must recite the phrase " I will take refuge in God from the accursed Satan." [618] Since reciting the name of Satan takes precedence over that of God, the road to God lies only through the "Devil." ʿAṭṭār also reformulated the image of the "touchstone" (*miḥakk*), which had first been used by ʿAyn al-Qużāt and he proposed that by embracing God's curse, Iblīs transformed himself into the *miḥakk*. He thus became the assayer of the sincerity of all who claimed to be servants of God, and he could identify counterfeit currency, which is a metaphor for his ability to expose insincerity and hypocrisy. At the end of this section, Iblīs declares his unconditional love for God even in the face of banishment—which for ʿAṭṭār was the most noble manifestation of Divine love. ʿAṭṭār then

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[617]While in his notes to the edition of *Ilāhī-nāma* Shafiʿī Kadkanī indicates that some of these ideas were raised by ʿAyn al-Qużāt, he falls short of naming 'that man of religion' as ʿAyn al-Qużāt. See ʿAṭṭār, *Ilāhī-nāma*, 582–83.

[618] This is in reference to Q 16:98 which states: "So when you recite the Qurʾan, [first] seek refuge in God from Satan, the Accursed." Therefore, it is standard practice for Muslims to recite: "I seek refuge in God from Satan, the accursed" before reading the Qurʾan.

adds his own interpretation of the story and suggests that to become a Sufi, one must learn the true meaning of manhood from Iblīs:

> If you are cursed by someone even once
> Within an hour you will be devastated by grief.
>
> First, like the true Sufis, become a man of the path (*mard-i rah*)
> And then sacrifice your life and go to the King.
>
> Why do you view Iblīs as a lowly being?
> He is the swindler of the great ones by his cunningness.
>
> Know with certainty that rulers
> Who broke the neck of hundreds like you
>
> Even though they are kings over your head
> They are nothing but beggar[s] in the army of Satan.
>
> When Iblīs's beggar is your king,
> How can you tread the path of Islam?
>
> Iblīs is not devoid of this burning pain for a second
> Learn manliness (*mardī*) from accursed Iblīs.
>
> Since he became a man of the spiritual battlefield
> Everything he does is in accordance with the Truth.[619]

This could be taken as a brief manual of spiritual chivalry in which ʿAṭṭār instructs the reader to first become a "man of the path" (*mard-i rah*) like Iblīs and then sacrifice his life in order to be able to reach God. ʿAṭṭār chides anyone who assumes Iblīs is a lowly figure not only because he had subdued many great rulers, but more importantly because he experiences burning pain (*sūz*) on the spiritual battlefield (*maydān-i maʿnī*). Hence, for the seeker on the path, Iblīs is an example to be followed.

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[619] ʿAṭṭār, *Ilāhī-nāma*, p. 213, lines 2309–16.

The tale immediately following the aforementioned passage concerns Sultan Maḥmūd of Ghazna and his favorite Turkish male slave, Abū al-Najm Ayāz (d. 449/1057), whose passionate relationship with the sultan became a topos in classical Persian literature. In the *Ilāhī-nāma*, the allusion to Maḥmūd and Ayāz's love is repeated in many stories. The general theme of all these stories is that, despite being a slave, Ayāz was greatly loved by Maḥmūd. In one of these stories ʿAṭṭār relates that one-night Ayāz was massaging and kissing the feet of Maḥmūd. The sultan asked Ayāz: "Why, out of all the body parts, have you chosen the feet, which are the lowliest, and not the face?"[620] Ayāz replied: "Since everybody enjoys your face, and no one has access to your feet, I have chosen your feet. Since there is no one who does this out of sincerity, I deemed this to be the most special thing to do."[621] ʿAṭṭār explains this tale in terms of Iblīs's relationship with God, implicitly comparing Maḥmūd to God and Ayāz to the "Devil":

> The same also had happened to Iblīs
> Who, out of all things, was asking for severity (*qahr*).
>
> He could see that many were after His kindness (*luṭf*)
> But he was seeking His *qahr*, which was owed to him.
>
> Because he was seeking only His *qahr*
> He became superior to many in [spiritual] manliness.
>
> When it became definite that he was accused
> He became resolute, and in an instant, he gained a footing [on the path].
>
> Because the curse was the robe of honor (*khilʿat*) from His gate
> That is why for Iblīs it was beautiful.
>
> With the curse, he became the adversary of men and women
> He deceived many of the people of the world.
>
> If he did not gain his strength from that curse
> Then how could he exert force on the people?

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[620] ʿAṭṭār, *Ilāhī-nāma*, p. 213, lines 2317–21.
[621] ʿAṭṭār, *Ilāhī-nāma*, pp.213–14, line 2322–24.

When that curse became pleasing to him, he asked for respite
He chose it over his life and asked for eternal life.

Because he was endeared [by God] even despite having the robe of honor [of accursedness]
With that endearment (*nāz*) he was able to have a long life.

No one figured out the [secret] of the curse—
That he became the seeker of the collar of accursedness (*ṭauq-i laʿnat*).

That curse became bountiful for him from God
Even though for others it became like death.[622]

In explaining Iblīs's love for God, ʿAṭṭār went one step further than ʿAyn al-Qużāt, suggesting that Iblīs actively and knowingly chose to seek the *qahr* of God; and because he was only seeking the *qahr*, he became spiritually superior to all. ʿAṭṭār proposes that in doing so, he received what he was seeking from God in the form of the curse, which he wore as a robe of honor (*khilʿat*). The second suggestion here is that by cursing Iblīs, God gave him the power to overcome all creation. ʿAṭṭār indicates that because Iblīs saw that even after being cursed he was still granted respite, he considered the curse to be the robe of honor granted to him by God and liked it so much that he wanted to have eternal life (*ʿumr-i jāvīd*). As ʿAṭṭār concludes, God's curse was only beneficial to Iblīs and not for others; therefore, the esoteric meaning is that Iblīs is the most select (*khāṣṣ*) lover of God, just as Ayāz was for Maḥmūd. It is also noteworthy that, the metaphor *ṭauq-i laʿnat*, which was later used by other Persian poets, was first used by ʿAṭṭār in relation to Iblīs.

Immediately after this story, ʿAṭṭār begins the next tale about two young persons from a desert tribe who were secretly in love. While the story does not specifically mention the gender of any of the two, it appears that the love was also homosexual. One day there was a massive storm,

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[622] ʿAṭṭār, *Ilāhī-nāma*, p. 214, lines 2325–35.

and everyone was running into tents for cover. As it happens, the lovers ran into the same tent. As the rain intensified, everyone hid under the covers and the lovers also ended up under one cover where they made love only with their eyes and their whispers; and while everyone else in the tent was praying to God for the rain to stop, one of the lovers was praying for the rain to intensify so that he could stay close to his beloved as long as possible.[623] ʿAṭṭār compares this story to the relationship between Iblīs with God:

> When God desired for Iblīs to be cursed
> Iblīs also wanted the same thing, even more.
>
> Because God spoke to him without any intermediary
> That is why Iblīs asked only about himself
>
> When that cursed one was ordered to prostrate himself
> He closed the eye with which he could view the path ahead.
>
> Iblīs was told: "Prostrate yourself," and he said: "[To] no other."
> Iblīs was told: "Get lost," and he responded: "No harm done,
>
> Even though I caused myself to be cursed
> I will never bow down before anyone but Him.
>
> If I even looked at anybody else
> I would not be given the decree over all creation from sea to sky."[624]

The lover who asked for more rain knew that even though too much rain was bad for everyone including himself, it became a desirable calamity since it was the only way that it could bring him and his beloved closer. According to ʿAṭṭār, this was also the case with Iblīs. He did not care about the future because he intentionally shut the eye with which he could foresee the path (*chashm-i rāh-bīn*) which would lead him to his doom. He knew that to not prostrate himself before Adam

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[623] ʿAṭṭār, *Ilāhī-nāma*, pp. 214–15, lines 2336–53.
[624] ʿAṭṭār, *Ilāhī-nāma*, p. 215, lines 2354–59.

would result in his being cursed, but since he spoke to God without intermediary (*bī-vāsiṭa*), he deemed himself superior not only to Adam, but to the entire creation. When he was told "prostrate yourself," he said: "[to]no other" (*lā ghayr*), and when he was told to get lost, he responded that there is no harm in being banished and cursed by God because he could not prostrate himself before anything else except his Beloved. There is a strong indication that some of the vocabulary used by ʿAṭṭār about Iblīs, such as the utterance of "[to]no other" (*lā ghayr*), as well as depicting him as a carefree lover in the face of God's wrath, were taken directly from al-Ḥallāj's *Ṭāsīn al-azal wa al-iltibās*.

The next tale immediately after this is yet another one about Sultan Maḥmūd and Ayāz. ʿAṭṭār relates that when Maḥmūd was on his deathbed, he asked for Ayāz so that he might speak to him one last time. People asked Maḥmūd: "Was not a lifetime of intimacy enough?" to which he responded: "That is precisely why I need him for such moments, because the love must be an eternal affair, both in this world and in the next."[625] He then called Ayāz and whispered in his ear: "When I pass away, I am not comfortable with you being in the service of another."[626] Ayāz responded: "If I were a scavenger (*murdār-khār*), I would never be able to hunt someone like Maḥmūd. As long as someone as great as Maḥmūd is entangled in my locks, I will serve no other and remain loyal to you as long as I live."[627] ʿAṭṭār then brought in Iblīs, stating that he also had the same feelings toward God:

> In that moment when Iblīs became accursed,
> He began to sanctify and glorify [God],
>
> Saying: "The curse coming from You is a hundred-fold sweeter
> Than You turning Your attention toward strangers."

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[625] ʿAṭṭār, *Ilāhī-nāma*, p. 215, lines 2362–66.
[626] ʿAṭṭār, *Ilāhī-nāma*, pp. 215–16, lines 2367–69.
[627] ʿAṭṭār, *Ilāhī-nāma*, pp. 215–16, lines 2370–73.

If a dog leaves the gate on account of being injured
He will remain constantly without a bone.

What am I saying?! When Iblīs heard God's curse
He saw only the speaker in that curse.

The one who drank pure wine for thousands of years—
And no small amount—he drank whole cups, one after the other.

Although in the end, he drank one sip of the dregs
He can never forget all those pure wines.

When he saw Him in those pure wines for thousands of years
Then how could he see anyone else in those dregs?

Since his destined lot was a curse from that Court (*dargah*)
And since God named him "the cursed one,"

He did not regard this [i.e., accursedness] as either hideous or pleasant
But he only regarded this as something that was coming from His Court.

Since his robe of honor was the curse from His Court
He heartily accepted it and the tale was finished.[628]

This was perhaps the first time that such a version of Iblīs's story was related, in which Iblīs, after being cursed, did not blame God, as the Qurʾan states, but glorified and praised Him. While the rest of this section is somewhat similar to the writings of al-Ḥallāj and ʿAyn al-Qużāt on Iblīs, ʿAṭṭār did not reveal whether this section was based on their works. This poem complements what earlier Sufis, especially al-Ḥallāj, wrote about the moment Iblīs refused to prostrate himself before Adam and how he was mesmerized by the glory of God. What ʿAṭṭār depicted here was the moment right after Iblīs's refusal. When God was cursing Iblīs, what he took from that curse was not grudge or hate, but only a gaze, perhaps out of being mesmerized by the beauty and glory of the one who was uttering the curse, i.e., God. Using the Persian trope of wine drinking as a metaphor for

[628] ʿAṭṭār, *Ilāhī-nāma*, p. 216, lines 2374–84.

mystical drunkenness, ʿAṭṭār then reminds the reader that Iblīs had been the boon companion of God, drinking pure wine (*ṣāfī*) for thousands of years, and he will not forget his Host even when being served the dregs (*durdī*), i.e., the curse, because all the while he was gazing at his Beloved cup-bearer (*sāqī*).

ʿAṭṭār follows this story with other anecdotes about Iblīs, and the reference to the story mentioned in the *Tazkirat al-auliyāʾ* about Iblīs being the only one privy to Adam's secret.[629] However, here ʿAṭṭār raises another reason to explain why Iblīs refused to prostrate himself:

> Since the accursed Iblīs was the knower of secrets (*asrār-dān*)
> If he had not prostrated himself, [it] was because of that [i.e., the knowledge of the secret]
>
> He thought neither he nor anyone else was worthy of that secret
> And that claimer (*daʿvī-gar*) (i.e., Iblīs) did not begin to prostrate himself,
>
> So that neither he nor anyone else
> May see that court or the threshold [of God].
>
> So that not even a ray of light which is behind the veil of majesty (*parda-yi ʿizz*)
> Should ever be tainted by any gaze.[630]

Contrary to the account in the *Tazkirat al-auliyāʾ*, here Iblīs is depicted not as the only knower of Adam's secret (*sirr*), but as the only one who knows God's secrets (*asrār*), and he does not deem anyone, including himself, worthy of them and that is why he wanted the light of God's secret to remain hidden under the veil of *ʿizz*. Hence, Iblīs's role as the Chamberlain of God's majesty (*parda-dār-i ʿizzat*), a concept first voiced by ʿAyn al-Qużāt, is once again affirmed. In explaining why Iblīs treasured God's curse, ʿAṭṭār explains:

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[629] ʿAṭṭār, *Tazkirat al-auliyāʾ*, 1:470
[630] ʿAṭṭār, *Ilāhī-nāma*, p. 217, lines 2390–93.

Someone asked Iblīs, "O ominous one!
When you recognized your own accursedness,

Why did you accept such accursedness with open arms?
And hid it like a treasure in your heart?"

Iblīs responded: "The curse is the arrow of the King
But first, [in order to shoot the arrow,] the gaze must be on the target.

At first one must gaze at the target
So that one can shoot the arrow from the bow.

At this moment, you are only aware of the arrow
But if you have keen vision, then gaze upon the eye.[631]

The metaphor of arrow and target was used masterfully by ʿAṭṭār, who suggests that Iblīs treasured the curse because it was like an arrow, and the bowman (i.e., God) could not have shot it unless he first gazed upon the target, in this case, Iblīs, who did not care about being shot, but was rather honored to be the subject of God's gaze. To Sufis, God's gaze (*naẓar*) was a sign of His affirmation and grace, and they sought it fervently. Therefore, Iblīs reminded the questioner that if God had not gazed at him first, he would not have received the honor of being the target of His arrow (i.e., curse), and that was why he treasured it. ʿAṭṭār this time reverses the process of story-telling by providing a story in which Maḥmūd mistakenly shot and injured Ayāz with an arrow, and Ayāz was happy about it because he must have become the target of the sultan's gaze before he had been shot, and to him that was a great honor.[632]

Unlike most romantic stories about two lovers in Persian literature, such as Laylī and Majnūn, Vīs and Rāmīn, Vāmiq and ʿAẕrā, Khusrau and Shīrīn, and Joseph and Zulaykhā—which were heteroerotic—the homoerotic romance of Maḥmūd and Ayāz is somewhat unique in Persian literature because there are almost no other examples where the name of the two same-sex lovers

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[631] ʿAṭṭār, *Ilāhī-nāma*, p. 217, lines 2400–2404.
[632] ʿAṭṭār, *Ilāhī-nāma*, p. 218, lines 2405–20.

are mentioned so often in a wide range of literary sources. One might ask why ʿAṭṭār chose a homoerotic example to depict the relationship between God and Iblīs. This is most unusual when one considers that almost all mystical authors before and after ʿAṭṭār did not shy away from comparing God to a female beloved (e.g., Laylī) and the Sufi to a male lover (e.g., Majnūn). This literary choice of ʿAṭṭār in the God-Iblīs relationship perhaps stemmed from the fact that to Sufi authors, God was always the King or Sultan, and this would match the image of Maḥmūd perfectly. It could also be that ʿAṭṭār viewed God and Iblīs not as opposite entities the way male-female lovers are, but as being of the same essence and complementing each other.

The following story, also recounted in the *Taẕkirat al-auliyāʾ,* is about the ninth-century Sufi Abū Bakr al-Shiblī. al-Shiblī was known to be a patient in the mental hospital in Baghdad on several occasions, as he suffered from psychotic breakdowns. As ʿAṭṭār relates, on one of those occasions when al-Shiblī was hospitalized, a group of his colleagues came to visit him. He asked them who they were, and they told him that they were his friends. When al-Shiblī heard this, he started to throw rocks at them, at which point they all ran away. al-Shiblī then said, "You are all liars in claiming to be my friends, because true friends do not run away from the wounds caused by a friend."[633] ʿAṭṭār then ties this story to Iblīs:

> When Iblīs saw the wound inflicted by the Beloved, he did not run away
> But turned the wound that was inflicted by Him into a hundred salves.
>
> Accept in your heart any wound that He inflicts upon you
> Because if He inflicts it on your heart, then He inflicts it beautifully.
>
> If an iota of love appears
> Then you will seek that wound with an open heart.
>
> Do you assume that the wound He causes is free?
> Thousands of years of prayer is the price of it.

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[633] ʿAṭṭār, *Taẕkirat al-auliyāʾ*, 1:670–71; ʿAṭṭār, *Ilāhī-nāma*, pp. 218–19, line 2421–29.

Although he (i.e., Iblīs) worshipped [God] for thousands of years
That was the value of one hour of his curse.

You are extremely worthy of a God
Who says: "You are not worthy of Me."

O friend! Hear the tale of Iblīs
Leave the deception for a moment and listen!

If you ever had such manliness
You could make an entire universe come to life at every moment.

Despite being banished and cursed on the path
Iblīs is always in the presence of the King.

Why do you curse him day and night?
Learn from him the true meaning of being a Muslim.[634]

As a perfect and mature lover, Iblīs not only welcomed the wound (*zakhm*) inflicted by the Friend but had the ability to turn it into a salve (*marham*). When it came to the love that Iblīs had for God, ʿAṭṭār was able to turn all the negative elements into positive ones; and to him, all this was possible by the power of Divine love. The wound that God inflicts is better than a hundred lives, and the price for a thousand of years of prayers is a curse. One is extremely desired by God if He tells him: "You are not wanted." In this paradoxical universe, a true lover like Iblīs can be constantly present at the King's court only when he is banished and cursed (*rāndah va malʿūn*) by Him. ʿAṭṭār enjoins the reader to learn the essence of "being Muslim" (*musalmānī*) from him, another idea borrowed from ʿAyn al-Qużāt.

The last story in this section is the tale of a meeting between Moses and Iblīs which at the time ʿAṭṭār composed *Ilāhī-nāma* had become a well-established motif in Perso-Islamic literature. ʿAṭṭār describes the meeting as follows:

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[634] ʿAṭṭār, *Ilāhī-nāma*, p. 219, line 2430–39.

One night, Moses was going to Mount Sinai
Iblīs came to him from afar.

Moses said to him: "O you who are full of [hot] air
Why did you not prostrate yourself before Adam?"

The accursed one answered: "O you who are accepted by God
Without any cause, I became affected by the power.

If I had a way to perform that prostration
I would be a *kalīm* (one who spoke with God) like you.

But since God, who is Exalted, willed as such
Then how could I falsify it when this was the truth?"

Moses said to him: "O you who are fallen and ensnared
Do you remember God at all?"

The accursed one responded: "How does a loving person like me
Ever forget Him for a moment?

For as long as His vengeance increases toward me
His love increases in my breast."

Although he (i.e., Iblīs) is far from the Divine court on account of being cursed
According to Moses, he is in proximity [to God].

Despite having his heart illuminated by the curse
The curse also made his burning even more, nevertheless.[635]

While the theme of this tale repeats what al-Ḥallāj and Aḥmad Ghazālī had already said, as discussed in the previous chapter, certain nuances make it more appealing to a Persian reader. In ʿAṭṭār's version, the meeting takes place at night, which is a special time for Sufis—the time for mystical union with God. When Moses asked Iblīs about his refusal, Iblīs replied that if he had prostrated himself before Adam, at best he would have had Moses's title, i.e., "the one who spoke with God" (*kalīm Allāh*). Iblīs not only held such a rank already, but he also saw God, a privilege

[635] ʿAṭṭār, *Ilāhī-nāma*, pp. 219–20, lines 2440–49.

that was not bestowed upon Moses. And when Moses asked him whether he still remembered God, Iblīs affirmed it by stating that he is a loving person (*mihrbān*) and that no matter how vengeful God is toward him, his relationship is ultimately driven by his love (*mihr*) for Him. As ʿAṭṭār suggests, Moses testified that Iblīs was close to God precisely because he was cursed. On account of that curse, Iblīs's heart was illuminated (*dil-furūz*), and the burning pain (*sūz*) he experienced only increased. Having these two traits, namely the illuminated heart and the burning pain, are at the core of Sufi teaching; and by stating that Iblīs had acquired these two traits, ʿAṭṭār demonstrates his view that Iblīs was a mature Sufi saint who, although an unconventional role model, was able to teach the essence of mysticism to seekers on the path.

That is perhaps why Iblīs was mentioned one last time in the epilogue of the *Ilāhī-nāma* in a story about Abū Bakr al-Shiblī. According to ʿAṭṭār, al-Shiblī once saw Iblīs in Mecca among the pilgrims on the plain of ʿArafāt. He told Iblīs: "O accursed one! Since you are not a Muslim and you do not obey God, what are you doing here? Do you still have hope?"[636] When Iblīs heard this, he became saddened and responded:

> For a hundred thousand years constantly
> I have worshipped God while being torn between hope and fear.
>
> I have guided the angels to God
> I have led all the lost ones to this gate.
>
> I had a heart full of His majesty
> I testified to His oneness.
>
> If all of a sudden, despite all these merits
> God expelled me from His presence without any cause,
>
> And no one among the creatures of His court
> Had the courage to ask Him: "Why did You expel him suddenly?"

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[636] ʿAṭṭār, *Ilāhī-nāma*, p. 406, lines 6540–44.

Then if He accepts me back again without any cause
It would not be strange, and no objection would be raised.

Since I was expelled oppressively without any reason
I can also be called back by Him without any reason.

Since there is no "why" and "how" in God's work
Then cutting off hope from God is also not appropriate.

Since His severity (*qahr*) made the decree and expelled me in the beginning
It would not be strange if His benevolence (*fażl*) called me back.[637]

While this reaffirms the prevalence of Ashʿarī belief among the Sufis—which stipulated that God did not require justification for his actions—it also provides a glimpse into what Sufis assumed to be the fate of Iblīs. While the general message of the tale was to reassure the reader to have hope in God's benevolence even if one is as hopeless as Iblīs, it also serves as a warning to anyone who assumes that prayer and obedience to God are a guarantee of salvation. If Iblīs, who saw God and spoke to Him directly and obeyed and worshipped him for hundreds of thousands of years, could be cursed and banished for no reason, then all the ascetics (*zuhhād*) who think that their meritorious deeds will grant them salvation should tremble with fear.

5.2.3 *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*

Perhaps the most well-known *maṣnavī* of ʿAṭṭār is his *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, an allegorical tale about a group of birds led by the hoopoe who go in search of their king, the Sīmurgh, the mythical bird of Persian literature and in the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* the symbol of God. The birds traverse seven difficult valleys (*vādī*) of experience, and in the end only thirty birds reach cosmic mountain, Mount Qāf, which is the abode of Sīmurgh. Once there they realize that the Sīmurgh is nothing but the sum of

[637] ʿAṭṭār, *Ilāhī-nāma*, p. 406, lines 6546–54.

themselves, i.e., thirty birds (*sī murgh*). Iblīs appears in several stories in the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* as a positive figure even before the journey of the birds begins. In one story, ʿAṭṭār relates:

> Once God told Moses in secret:
> "You should consider seeking a mystery (*rāz*) from Iblīs."
>
> When Moses saw Iblīs on the road
> He became the seeker of mystery from Iblīs.
>
> Iblīs said: "Constantly remember this one thing:
> Do not say 'I' so that you do not become like me."[638]

The origins of this story lie in two earlier accounts. One was by the great Sufi of Khurāsān, Abū Saʿīd Abū al-Khayr Mīhanī (d. 440/1049), who stated that Iblīs walks through the bazaars and says: "O people of the towns and villages! Watch that you do not become self-obsessed and say 'I,' and take heed of what has befallen me from saying 'I'."[639] The second account is told in a Sufi Qurʾan commentary on Sūra Yūsuf called *al-Sittin al-jāmiʿ li-latā'if al-basātīn* by Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad Zayd Ṭūsī (fl. 7th/13th century). In a story he relates in this commentary, Ṭūsī states:

> There was an ascetic (*zāhid*) in the city of Marv who had built a monastery (*ṣaumaʿa*) on top of a mountain and secluded himself there. For sixty years, he fasted every day and prayed all night. One day, he left the monastery to perform ablutions. Poor Iblīs was passing by and he sensed the scent of that purity which reminded him of his own previous state [in heaven]. He went inside the monastery, closed the door, picked up the prayer beads of the ascetic and was rubbing his eyes and heart with them while lamentingly:

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[638] Farīd al-Dīn Muḥammad b ʿAṭṭār Nīshābūrī. Ibrāhīm *Mantiq al-ṭayr*, ed. Muḥammad Riżā Shafīʿī Kadkanī, 12th ed (Tehran: Sukhan, 1391/2012), p. 366, lines 2952–54.

[639] Muḥamamd b. Munavvar b. Abū Saʿd b. Abū Ṭahir b. Abū Saʿīd Mīhanī, *Asrār al-tauḥīd fī māqāmāt al-shaykh Abī Saʿīd*, ed. Muḥammad Riżā Shafīʿī Kadkanī (Tehran: Āgāh, 1381/2002), 1:297.

> You (i.e., God) suddenly wounded me with the arrow of separation
> You shot me suddenly and I was not aware.
>
> Now that my destiny has become darkened on account of separation from You
> At least take a look at me just once, unexpectedly.
>
> The ascetic made his ablutions and when he returned, he found the door of the monastery closed. He thought to himself that maybe one of his pupils was inside, so he knocked. Iblīs responded: "Who is it?" The ascetic said: "It is I." This happened three times until the fire of separation in Iblīs's heart started to become a thousand-fold and he jumped and opened the door and came out and revealed himself in that state of absence of inner light and forsakenness (*bī nūrī va mahjūrī*) and told the ascetic: "O man! Watch out that you do not say 'I' so that you do not become like me. For seven hundred thousand years I trod the same path that you are treading now and only once said what you have said and look what happened to me!"[640]

In all three versions of the story, Iblīs appears as a truthful admonisher; but in ʿAṭṭār and Ṭūsī's versions, he is giving warning to the select servants of God. In terms of storytelling, Ṭūsī's version is more dramatic and depicts Iblīs as a tragic lover of God, while in his version ʿAṭṭār gets right to the core message. However, what makes ʿAṭṭār's version unique is the fact that God, instead of warning Moses to avoid Iblīs, commands him to go and learn from him. Following in the footsteps of al-Ḥallāj regarding the chastisement of Moses by Iblīs, ʿAṭṭār went one step further and made God the intermediary in the meeting between Moses and Iblīs, an indication that Iblisophile Sufis rarely viewed Iblīs as a threat to their faith. This story of ʿAṭṭār's is also reminiscent of the Qurʾanic

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[640] Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Zayd Ṭūsī, *al-Sittin al-jāmiʿ li-latāʾif al-basātīn: Tafsīr-i sūra-yi Yūsuf*, ed. Moḥammad Raushan (Tehran: Bungāh-i Tarjuma va Nashr, 1345/1966), 63.

story about Moses's encounter with the elusive Khiżr, who acts as a guide for the men of God.[641] The one big difference is that while in the case of Khiżr God did not command Moses to seek him, in ʿAṭṭār's story, God specifically commanded Moses to seek the advice of Iblīs. Therefore, for ʿAṭṭār, Iblīs not only can assume the role of Khiżr did for Moses, but Iblīs's rank is so high that God enjoins his prophet to actively seek his advice, thus making Iblīs's status even higher than Khiżr's.

The journey of the birds in the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr* takes them through seven valleys (*wādī*), which symbolize the seven stages that a Sufi novice must go through in order to become perfected and worthy of union with God. The first valley is the stage of seeking (*ṭalab*), and not surprisingly, the first tale of this valley is about Iblīs—which underscores his significance in ʿAṭṭār's writing. This story was also recounted in the tale of the *Ganj-nāma* in the *Taẕkirat al-auliyāʾ* in the section dedicated to ʿAmr ibn ʿUthmān Makkī, according to which Iblīs, as the only angel who refused to prostrate himself before Adam, was able to see the secret of the treasure (*sirr-i ganj*), which God had put into Adam's body.[642] After God threatened Iblīs with beheading for seeing the secret of the treasure without permission, Iblīs asked for respite. In the version of the story told in the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, God responded: "I guarantee you respite, but I will place the collar of accursedness (*ṭauq-i laʿnat*) around your neck and proclaim you to be a liar so that you may remain suspect until the Resurrection Day."[643] Iblīs then responded:

> Since [the secret of] that pure treasure
> Became clear to me, I no longer am afraid of the curse.
>
> The curse is Yours, the blessing Yours
> The slave is Yours, the allotment [of destiny] is Yours.

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[641] Q 18:60–82.
[642] ʿAṭṭār, *Taẕkirat al-auliyāʾ*, 1:470; *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, pp. 381–82, lines 3273–95.
[643] ʿAṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, pp. 382, lines 3289–90.

If my allotment is accursedness, I am not afraid
Because there is also poison [in life], and not all is healing antidote.

Since I have seen all people seeking the blessing
I accepted Your curse without any attention to propriety.

There is a servant seeking Your curse, just as they (i.e., the rest of creation) seek Your blessing
I am the servant of the curse (*banda-yi laʿnat*) which is not bestowed on anyone else.[644]

ʿAṭṭār states that like Iblīs, one has to become a seeker (*ṭālib*) on the mystical path who seeks whatever God has in store for him even if it is His curse. Just as others welcome God's blessing (*raḥmat*) only a true seeker like Iblīs welcomes and becomes the servant of God's curse because a true seeker accepts without question whatever his Beloved gives him. Hence, in ʿAṭṭār's view, Iblīs is the model of the perfect seeker.

5.2.4 *Muṣībat-nāma*

According to Shafīʿī Kadkanī, the *Muṣībat-nāma* was ʿAṭṭār's last *maṯnavī*.[645] As in the *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, its main theme is the spiritual journey of a traveler called *Sālik-i fikrat* (Seeker of [spiritual] thought) who is seeking the truth and the secret of the soul (*sirr-i jān*). Sālik pleads with forty celestial and terrestrial beings, including angels, prophets, and inanimate elements such as wind, for advice on how to liberate his mind from the state of affliction (*muṣībat*). Similar to ʿAṭṭār's other works, Iblīs appears to be an important figure, represented in one of the stages as both a necessary character in running worldly affairs as well as a Sufi sage who guides Sālik on the mystical path.

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[644] ʿAṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, pp. 382, lines 3291–95.
[645] ʿAṭṭār, *Manṭiq al-ṭayr*, 35.

In this work ʿAṭṭār emphasizes that all worldly possessions are a donation (*waqf*) to Iblīs. He then follows this point by recounting a story in which Solomon asks God to place Iblīs under his command.[646] Despite being the richest ruler, Solomon earned his living by weaving baskets and selling them in the market. The day Iblīs was put under his command, Solomon sent his servant to the market to sell the basket he had woven, but the servant could not find any buyer and therefore Solomon went hungry that day. The next day, he made a better basket but again his servant was unable to find a buyer in the market, and he went hungry for another day. Solomon became weak, and God asked him what had happened. Solomon said that he was weak because he had not eaten anything, and God mockingly told him to go and eat something. Solomon told God that he could not eat because he could not sell his baskets, and therefore he did not have any money to buy food. God then told him that as long as Iblīs, who was the lord of the market, was imprisoned by Solomon, there would be no buying and selling, because the entirety of worldly affairs had been bequeathed to him (*kār-i dunyā jumla mauqūf-i vay ast*).[647] As well as viewing Iblīs as a steadfast lover of God, ʿAṭṭār also deemed Iblīs to have a crucial role in managing the day-to-day affairs of humans in the world.

ʿAṭṭār was one of the few Persian Sufi poets who believed that both worldly possessions and worldly affairs had been donated (*waqf*) to Iblīs. This point is also demonstrated in another section of the *Muṣībat-nāma*, namely in a recounting of the famous fable about Jesus and Iblīs.[648] According to this story, one day Jesus was sleeping on the ground while using a brick as a pillow. When he opened his eyes, he saw Iblīs standing over him. He asked Iblīs why he was standing

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[646] Farīd al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Ibrāhīm ʿAṭṭār Nīshābūrī, *Muṣībat-nāma*, ed. Muḥammad Riżā Shafīʿī Kadkanī (Tehran: Sukhan, 1386/2007), pp. 219–20, lines 2206–2231.

[647] ʿAṭṭār, *Muṣībat-nāma*, p. 220, line 2231.

[648] ʿAṭṭār, *Muṣībat-nāma*, p. 272, lines 3346–3352.

there, and Iblīs responded: "All the world is my fief (*iqṭāʿ*), including that brick that you use as a pillow. As long as you use my *iqṭāʿ*, you are considered one of my followers (*dar silk-i man*)." Jesus then threw the brick away and decided to go back to sleep, in response to which Iblīs said: "Now you can sleep peacefully as I am going."[649]

These two stories portray not God, but Iblīs, as the custodian of all worldly affairs—which could be deemed as heretical by Islamic orthodoxy. In the first story, God appears to feign ignorance of Solomon's conundrum to teach him a lesson that if Iblīs is devoid of his inherent duty, the affairs of the world will stop. In the second story, Iblīs appears to be chastising the prophet Jesus for using something that belongs to his *iqṭāʿ*. The term *iqṭāʿ* refers to the system in which concession of revenue or land was given to individuals, usually military commanders or high-ranking officials. *Iqṭāʿ* grants were often associated with the performance of military duties, and from the eleventh century onwards, often with the provision of troops and the grant of governmental functions and immunities.[650] Iblīs's claim that the entire world was his *iqṭāʿ* might seems heretical because, according to the Qurʾan, "To God belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth (Q 2:284)". However, a closer reading of the wording in the stories above reveals that Iblīs only holds an *iqṭāʿ* or a *waqf*, both of which refer only to custodianship of a property, not ownership. Therefore, ʿAṭṭār portrays Iblīs as the active agent of God, in charge of everything that is worldly which in itself is an immense privilege for the "Devil," without whom the daily affairs of the world would fall into chaos.

In the *Muṣībat-nāma*, Iblīs also appears to be chastising Pharaoh for claiming to be a god.[651] In one story, Iblīs once visited Pharaoh and picked up a handful of pebbles from the ground and

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[649] ʿAṭṭār, *Muṣībat-nāma*, p. 272, lines 3349–52.
[650] *Encyclopædia Iranica*. s.v. "Eqṭāʿ."
[651] ʿAṭṭār, *Muṣībat-nāma*, p. 278, lines 3465–74

turned them into pearls and then back into pebbles. He then asked Pharaoh if he could perform such an act. When Pharaoh responded negatively, Iblīs chastised him for claiming to be a god while being so powerless, and then told him:

> Despite having such great power
> I am not accepted even as a servant [by God].
>
> Since you have leprosy and baldness up to your ears
> When will you ever be accepted as a god? Be silent![652]

The role of Iblīs as the chastiser of human self-aggrandizement was rarely discussed in the work of other Iblisophile Sufis. Here, ʿAṭṭār depicts Iblīs in a new capacity, not as the deceiver of evil people, but as someone who mocks their haughtiness and presumption of grandeur.

The most emphatic praise of Iblīs in the *Muṣībat-nāma* comes in the section where *Sālik* comes to Iblīs for advice. He begins by referring to Iblīs with lofty titles, such as "the one who gathered the secret of mystical state and speech (*sirr-i ḥāl va qāl*) for seven hundred thousand years," "the one who has the heart of believers in his mouth" (compare this with the hadith *qudsī* which says "The heart of the believer is between the fingers of the Merciful One), and "the one whose domain is from the sea to the moon and whose path is from east to west."[653] Most importantly, *Sālik* calls Iblīs "O you from whom no one is more afflicted (*nīst kas az tu muṣībat-dīdatar*)."[654] Given the fact that the title of the book is *Muṣībat-nāma* (Book of affliction), it appears that ʿAṭṭār introduced Iblīs as the one from whom *Salīk* can learn the most, because Iblīs was the epitome of those who are struck by calamity (*muṣībat*). *Sālik* then asks Iblīs to divulge the hidden way to the treasure of knowledge in order to ease his suffering. Upon hearing this, Iblīs's "heart was overcome by

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[652] ʿAṭṭār, *Muṣībat-nāma*, p. 278, lines 3472–73.
[653] ʿAṭṭār, *Muṣībat-nāma*, p. 333, lines 4623, 4633–34.
[654] ʿAṭṭār, *Muṣībat-nāma*, p. 333, line 4626.

extreme grief (*dar khūn uftād*)" and fire blazed in his chest—which in Persian poetry is a reference to pain and suffering.[655] He then said to *Sālik*:

> At the beginning, for hundreds of thousands of years
> I have drunk from this cup which is full to the brim.
>
> In the end, I turned the cup upside-down
> The dregs of the curse came out from the bottom of it.
>
> From top to bottom, there is no place in both worlds
> In which I had not prostrated myself [before God].[656]

Iblīs then continued to say that suddenly, the torrent of suffering came, and he was cursed and turned into a rebellious Satan. The "Devil" also reveals that before he became cursed, he was aware that there would rise a rebel angel by the name of Iblīs, and that is why he was cursing Iblīs every day, without knowing that he was inadvertently cursing himself.[657] He then told *Sālik* to take admonition (*ʿibrat*) from his fate:

> I have the Truth from the curse, stay back!
> You cannot bear the curse, stay far![658]

As usual *Sālik* went to his *pīr* seeking further guidance and told him all that had transpired. The *pīr* then told *Sālik*:

> The sorrowful Iblīs is
> The learned one about envy and vanity from head to toe.
>
> Because he was asked "O you who fell far [from God]
> How did you become patient despite being so far [from God]?"
>
> Iblīs responded: "I am standing back with a blade in my hand
> I will repel everybody from That gate

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[655] ʿAṭṭār, *Muṣībat-nāma*, p. 333, line 4637.
[656] ʿAṭṭār, *Muṣībat-nāma*, 333–34, lines 4638–40.
[657] ʿAṭṭār, *Muṣībat-nāma*, p. 334, lines 4641–50.
[658] ʿAṭṭār, *Muṣībat-nāma*, p. 334, line 4651.

So that no one may come even close to it
In all the world, this task is sufficient for me.

I am standing back, my two eyes [crying] like clouds
Because I am ashamed of myself to look at His face.

I am standing back, because I cannot bear that anyone
Except me should see His face even for a second

I am standing back, because in His path
I am not worthy of His gate.

I am standing back, I have no head or feet
To burn for His sake, hence being far from Him, is better.

I am standing back, in a gloomy state due to the exile
Because I cannot bear the intimacy of His union.

Although I am banished from His gate
I will not turn away even an inch from His path.

Since I have stepped into the neighborhood of the Friend,
I have not looked in any direction but the Friend's.

Because I have become the intimate companion of the spiritual secret,
I will not look even a little at anyone else[659]

ʿAṭṭār uses the rhetorical device *īhām*, or equivoque, in the first hemistich of every verse on the phrase *dūr istādam*, "I am standing back," which can also be read *dūr ustādam*, that is, "I am a master from far" or "a far master" indicating that he is not a master in the conventional sense, but nonetheless, because he has been privy to the spiritual secret (*sirr-i maʿnī*), Sālik can learn from him many mystical lessons. The *pīr* here speaks for Iblīs and indeed assumes his role in explaining the true meaning of "stay far." For ʿAṭṭār, one has to become a perfected lover in order to appreciate the dilemma of Iblīs, and achieving this perfection is not possible unless one is completely rejected

[659] ʿAṭṭār, *Muṣībat-nāma*, p. 334, lines 4653–64.

by the Beloved while remaining completely loyal to Him. It is therefore only that kind of lover who, by standing far from the Beloved, can guide the novice who is worthy to become close to the Beloved. Despite knowing that he is rejected by God, Iblīs still loves Him so fervently that he does his utmost to keep the unworthy ones away from God, while at the same time keeping his own unworthy self far from the purity of his Beloved. This is the mark of a true lover—jealously protecting his Beloved even when the Beloved humiliates and rejects him.

It was Iblīs's unwavering loyalty to God that prompted ʿAṭṭār to continue the previous section with another story illustrative of it.[660] Once, a Sufi asked Iblīs why he disobeyed God's order and refused to prostrate himself before Adam. Iblīs responded by telling him a story about a Sufi who, when walking on the street one day, saw a princess who was very beautiful and fell madly in love with her. When the princess found out about the Sufi's lovesickness, she invited him to the court and asked him: "Why are you so melancholy and distraught?"[661] The Sufi responded that he had fallen madly in love with her and that caused him to become melancholy. The princess responded: "What would you do if you saw my sister? She is famous for being many times more beautiful than me, and if you look at her, you would never think I am beautiful. If you do not believe me, she is right behind you."[662] When the Sufi turned around to look at the sister, there was no one there and the princess told him: "If you were truly in love with me, you would not pay attention to another." She explained to those present: "I wanted to test him, and he failed the test because he was not a mature Sufi, but a green one (*ṣūfī-yi pukhta nabūd ū, khām būd*)," after which she had him executed.[663] ʿAṭṭār concludes:

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[660] ʿAṭṭār, *Muṣībat-nāma*, pp. 335–36, lines 4665–95.
[661] ʿAṭṭār, *Muṣībat-nāma*, p. 335, line 4676.
[662] ʿAṭṭār, *Muṣībat-nāma*, p. 335, lines 4683–86.
[663] ʿAṭṭār, *Muṣībat-nāma*, pp. 335–36, lines 4689–95.

The story of Iblīs and this story are one
I do not know why anyone would be doubtful about it.

Although he is rejected, he is not yet hopeless
As if his accursedness were not eternal.

Although at this moment his task is to be hopeless
He spends his days in hope.[664]

This quality of Iblīs, who remained loyal to his love for God and did not prostrate himself before anyone, moved ʿAṭṭār, and while his depiction of Iblīs resembled that of a tragic lover, he believed the tale of Iblīs was a tale of hope. Unlike the novice Sufi of the tale, Iblīs was mature enough not to prostrate himself before anyone other than his Beloved. For such a lover, rejection and being cursed by the Beloved is only temporary.

The section devoted Iblīs in the *Muṣībat-nāma* ends with the most dramatic and controversial story of all, one in which Iblīs gives advice to none other than the prophet Muḥammad.[665] According to the tale, one morning Iblīs went to Muḥammad's house and asked ʿAlī ibn Abū Ṭālib (d. 40/661) and Salmān-i Fārsī (d. ca. 33/653), two of Muḥammad's closest companions, for an audience with the prophet; but as ʿAṭṭār put it, since Iblīs was two-faced (*kūj-rū*), he was not granted one.[666] Here, perhaps ʿAṭṭār was hinting that while Iblīs might look devilish to some, he can be a saint to others, and hence he is two-faced. ʿAṭṭār continues:

Muḥammad said: "He is not granted an audience
Tell him to go away, as he has nothing to do with me.

When will the accursed Iblīs ever become a man worthy of me?
Or can ever be worthy of even looking at the dust [the under my feet]?"

In the end, [the angel] Gabriel came running
And said, [to Muḥammad] "Give that accursed one an audience just once,

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[664] ʿAṭṭār, *Muṣībat-nāma*, p.336, lines 4696–98.
[665] ʿAṭṭār, *Muṣībat-nāma*, pp. 336–37, lines 4669–726.
[666] ʿAṭṭār, *Muṣībat-nāma*, p. 336, line 4700.

So that he may tell you about the grief of his forsakenness
And tell you about the state of his painful separation."[667]

There are two subtle but significant issues reflected in these lines. First, it appears that, Muḥammad is depicted as the prideful one, boasting about his purity and voicing his disdain for Iblīs. As we shall see, this depiction is intentional in the plot of the story. Second, after Muḥammad's rejection of Iblīs, it is the archangel Gabriel who intercedes on behalf of Iblīs, which shows how esteemed Iblīs was in the sight of God, who sent one of his archangels running to his aid. This meeting was not about deceiving Muḥammad or plotting something against him. Gabriel, and by extension God, knew that all Iblīs wanted was to complain about the pain of separation, and they asked Muḥammad to simply lend an ear.

After Gabriel's intercession, Muḥammad agreed to see Iblīs. When Iblīs went inside, he greeted Muḥammad by saying *salām*, and then said:

"I know, may it be pleasant to you
That you went on a heavenly ascension (*miʿrāj*) last night."

Muḥammad said: "I did, O accursed one."
Iblīs asked: "Did you see the throne (*ʿarsh*) of the Lord of the Worlds?"

Muḥammad said: "I saw the throne and the firmament
And all the secrets and signs of God."

Iblīs asked: "Did you see the right side of the throne?"
Muḥammad said: "I did. It was the realm of light and melody (*ʿālam-i nūr wa navā*)."

Iblīs asked: "Have you seen the left side of God's throne
A dreadful plain and a black desert?"

Muḥammad said: "I did. It was far from my path"
Iblīs said: "That plain was the place where I preached (*majlis-gāh*).

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[667] ʿAṭṭār, *Muṣībat-nāma*, p. 336, lines 4701–4.

Did you see that upside-down standard (*ʿalam*)?
That was my standard, O guiding one

Did you see that broken pulpit (*minbar*)?
God had set that up for the sake of this broken heart.

That was my pulpit and I gave sermons
I considered myself gold and all others copper.

From among the angels, seven hundred rows of a hundred thousand
Would sit under that pulpit.

I kept preaching about God
And made them one by one acquainted [with divine knowledge].

How should I have known that I was the stranger?
They were the wise ones and I was the mad one."[668]

Despite Iblīs's lament, his encounter with Muḥammad was more about opening Muḥammad's eyes to his own celestial rank that was equal to, or even above, Muḥammad's. If Muḥammad had a pulpit, gave sermons, and had followers on earth, Iblīs's pulpit was on the left hand of God, and he gave sermons about God to hundreds of thousands of angels. While this might appear to be a taunting gesture on Iblīs's part, it was more to give lesson to Muḥammad, and perhaps even to humble him in the face of the "Devil." Finally, by calling Iblīs mad as opposed to "wise," ʿAṭṭār stresses the requirement for becoming the perfect lover of God, which according to some Sufis could only be achieved by completely losing one's intellect and embracing madness. As the story goes, Iblīs divulged to Muḥammad the main reason for his visit:

I presumed myself to be fortunate
I was unaware of the collar of "my curse" (*laʿnatī*)

The word "*laʿnatī*" consists of five letters:
Lām and *ʿayn* and *nūn* and *tā* and *yā*, one after the other.

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[668] ʿAṭṭār, *Muṣībat-nāma*, pp. 336–37, lines 4705–17.

Last night, the King who made your heavenly ascension possible
Put on your head the crown of "by your life" (*laʿamruka*).

O Friend! "*laʿamruka*" is made up of five letters:
Lām and *ʿay*n and *mīm* and *rā* and *kāf*.

Yours is five and mine is five,
Yours is comfort and mine is suffering.

My collar is five and your crown is five
Mine is dust and yours is treasure.

Even though you are both the apostle and trustworthy,
Take heed of my collar and do not consider yourself secure,

Because even though I am worth next to nothing
I see your crown and I am not yet hopeless.

I am not hopeless; you should not feel secure either,
Look at [God's] self-sufficiency and do not be complacent.[669]

In this final section of the story, Iblīs revealed the core of his message to Muḥammad, one that was essentially a poetic rendition of what al-Ḥallāj and ʿAyn al-Qużāt had said about the equal rank of Muḥammad and Iblīs. ʿAṭṭār relies on two Qurʾanic allusions which describe God's relationship to each of these individuals—which was also in line with the belief of some Sufis and most Iblisophile mystics. The first word, "*laʿnatī*" ("my curse"), taken from Q 38:78, which has been discussed extensively in previous chapters, was exoterically taken by Iblīs to be the mark of his doom and was represented by the collar (*ṭauq*) which in the context of this story symbolizes servitude and lowliness. The second term, "*laʿamruka*" ("by your life"), refers to Q 15:72, an oath God swore by Muḥammad's life. This phrase "*laʿamruka*" was taken by many Sufis to be one of greatest honors that God showed to Muḥammad in the Qurʾan. Iblīs viewed this honor to Muḥammad as a "crown" declaring his superiority to mankind. Yet Iblīs also reminded

[669] ʿAṭṭār, *Muṣībat-nāma*, p. 337, 4718–26.

Muḥammad that his own collar (*ṭauq)* and Muḥammad's crown (*tāj*) were made up of the same number of letters, having even the same first two letters, and both had been bestowed on them by God even if their destinies were different. He then warned Muḥammad to see his *ṭauq* and to not feel secure with God, because if ʿAzāzīl, master of all the angels and the possessor of a celestial pulpit, who gave sermons on the left side of God's throne, could fall out of favor, then a fallible human like Muḥammad should certainly not feel at ease, even if he had a God-given crown. After all, a God who is self-sufficient (*bī-niyāz*) can dismiss anyone He wishes without cause. At the same time, Iblīs does not feel hopeless, because he believes in the ocean of God's mercy.

This paradoxical idea of viewing Muḥammad and Iblīs as equal manifestation of divine will, confirms that ʿAṭṭār's Iblisology borrowed many of its themes form al-Ḥallāj and ʿAyn al-Qużāt. The portrayal of Iblīs in this story as a hidden sage strengthens the hypothesis that in the mind of Iblisophile Sufis like ʿAṭṭār, Iblīs remained an emanation of the Divine. The message that was given to Muḥammad could have been delivered to him by Gabriel, who interceded on Iblīs's behalf, but that would not have accurately depicted Iblīs's celestial rank. Muḥammad was given a lesson by none other than Iblīs, and that made Iblīs not only the (former) master of the angels, but also the teacher of the prophet of Islam.

As in the story of al-Shiblī and Iblīs in the *Ilāhī-nāma*, ʿAṭṭār's depiction of Iblīs as a hopeful figure conveys a positive message to his fellow Sufis who might have feared that in the end, God would not accept them. ʿAṭṭār enjoins his readers to go beyond the Qurʾanic and *qiṣaṣ al-anbiyāʾ* narratives about Iblīs and view him from the viewpoint of Iblisophile Sufis. Although there are many examples in ʿAṭṭār's writing in which Iblīs appears as the damned figure, with his fate described as a warning, from the vantage point of mysticism ʿAṭṭār's depiction of him is the most comprehensive in terms of recycling ideas of Iblisophile Sufis such as al-Ḥallāj and ʿAyn al-

Quż̄āt Hamadānī. ʿAṭṭār's Iblīs was appointed by God to be the teacher of the greatest prophets—Moses, Jesus, and Muḥammad—and he taught not by words, but by the example of his own personal experience.

ʿAṭṭār's Iblisophilic writing prompted many anonymous authors who came after him to compose even more daring works about Iblīs and attribute them to ʿAṭṭār. Pseudo-ʿAṭṭār *maṯnavī*s such as the *Bulbul-nāmā, Hīlāj-nāma, Ushtur-nāma, Vaṣlat-nāma*, and *Jauhar al-ẕāt* do not possess the depth of ʿAṭṭār's poetry, but they are testament to the fact that, by the beginning of thirteenth century, Iblisophilic writings, especially in poetic form, had become widespread in Persian literature.

5.3 **Rūmī's Iblisology**

The Persian poet who was greatly influenced by the style and ideas of ʿAṭṭār's poetry, including his Iblisology, was Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Balkhī, known as Rūmī, the most celebrated mystical poet in Persian and arguably in world literature. Rūmī was perhaps the last great Iblisophile Sufi in the history of Persian literature. Since there is a substantial amount of information about his life and thought, it is possible to trace the evolution of his views on Iblīs.

5.3.1 Rumī's Iblisophile Teachers

In the same way that al-Ḥallāj and ʿAyn al-Quż̄āt had been influenced by Iblisophile masters and colleagues, Rūmī's views on Iblīs were also inspired by his predecessors such as Sanāʾī and ʿAṭṭār, whose works Rūmī greatly admired. He was also inspired by some of his teachers including his father although the their positive attitude toward Iblīs was not as radical as al-Ḥallāj and ʿAyn al-Quż̄āt and this is perhaps why Rūmī's approach to Iblīs is also a balanced one.

5.3.1.1 Bahā-i Valad (d. 628/1231)

Rūmī's first teacher was his father Bahā al-Dīn Muḥammad Khaṭīb Balkhī, known as Bahā-i Valad, whose influence on Rūmī's writing is evident. Bahā-i Valad was a popular preacher (*vāʿiẓ*) and a religious legal expert (*muftī*) in the city of Balkh. The compilation of his sermons (*maqālāt*), known as *Maʿārif*, his only surviving work, provides evidence of his mystical inclinations although these conform to a more traditional interpretation of Islam. His Iblisology also fits into that religious mindset and there is almost no trace of Ibliosphilic tendencies in his sermons. For instance, in a passage of the *Maʿārif*, he states:

> Iblīs made a syllogism (*qiyās*) [in comparing his own creation to that of Adam] and God gave knowledge to the interior (*bāṭin*) of Adam. God then said [to Iblīs]: "The interior of Adam is illuminated by knowledge and your interior is darkened by ignorance. The exterior is subservient to the interior and the head is subservient to the heart's inner secret (*sirr*). Lower your exterior head in submissiveness to the secret of Adam and prostrate yourself because closeness to God cannot be attained except by prostration."[670]

This was a view shared by mainstream Muslim religious scholars (*ʿulamā)*. However, Bahā-i Valad acknowledged that the existence of Iblīs was part of God's grand plan for His creation. In one passage, he assigned the four elements (earth, water, air, fire) to the four characters in the story of Adam's expulsion from the Garden, namely, the peacock, the snake, Adam, and Satan. He

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[670] Muḥammad b. Ḥusayn Khatībī Balkhī Bahā-i Valad, *Maʿārif*, ed. Badīʿ al-Zamān Furūzānfar (Tehran: Kitābkhāna-yi Ṭahūrī, 1352/1973), 1:271.

equated the peacock with wind, the snake with water, Adam with earth, and Satan with fire.[671] According to Galenic medicine, which was adopted by Muslims, the four elements were linked to the four bodily humors, namely blood with air, yellow bile with fire, black bile with earth, and phlegm with water; an imbalance of these four would cause illness. Based on this idea Bahā-i Valad argued that must be a balance among all these elements and their symbolic associated creatures, both in nature and also within any person, and any imbalance would make the ego (*nafs*) sick.[672] Therefore the existence of Satan was a necessary evil, thereby again raising the point about the necessity of the creation of Adam versus Satan.[673]

5.3.1.2 Burhān al-Dīn Muḥaqqiq Tirmiẕī (d. 641/1244)

When Bahā-i Valad migrated from Balkh to Anatolia in the late 1210s with some of his compatriots and family, there was a Sufi disciple in his entourage by the name of Burhān al-Dīn Muḥaqqiq Tirmiẕī, who later became Rūmī's first Sufi master While Burhān al-Dīn Muḥaqqiq does not subscribe to any version of Iblisology, in his only surviving text, the *Maqālāt*, a compilation of his sermons, there are a few references in which he claimed that the states of Iblīs and the demons can be compared to a person who reaches the state of "I-ness" (*manī*).[674] However, in an excerpt in which there is a cryptic reference to Iblīs, he states:

> They [i.e., sinners] do such a [bad] thing to the one who possesses the secret of the King, how is it possible that [God's] wrath does not come upon them?... The is no god except God, "There is no god except me" (Q 20:14). How long should I say "You,

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[671] Bahā-i Valad, *Maʿārif*, 1:204
[672] Bahā-i Valad, *Maʿārif*, 1:204.
[673] Bahā-i Valad, *Maʿārif*, 2:155.
[674] Burhān al-Dīn Muḥaqqiq Tirmiẕī, *Maqālāt*, ed. Taufīq H. Subḥānī and Nāzanīn H. Sūbḥānī (Tehran: Anjuman-i Āṯār wa Mafākhir-i Farhangī, 1395/ 2016), 164.

> You?" I said it so long that You (i.e., God) became I and I became You. Unicity (*tauḥīd*) was achieved. I became a monotheist (*muvaḥḥid*). Now my prayers did this and I prayed like this. Whoever does not know me is an absolute wretch; there is no doubt. They [i.e. people] tell me: "You do not prostrate yourself [before God in prayers]." I say [instead]: "O Lord! Why do they [i.e. the commoners] not prostrate themselves before me?" "Except Iblīs who refused (Q 2:34)," the one who is the subject of prostration (*masjūd*) is not the one who prostrates himself (*sājid*).[675]

An exoteric interpretation of this passage suggests that Burhān al-Dīn Muḥaqqiq viewed himself as one who had reached a stage where he no longer need to perform prostration in the obligatory daily prayers. More importantly, he is the one who must be the object of people's prostration, and if they did not perform it, they would be like Iblīs, who refused. Nevertheless, there may be an esoteric reading of this passage. It is hard to imagine that Burhān al-Dīn Muḥaqqiq was unaware that previous Iblisophile Sufis viewed Iblīs as the one who possessed the Divine secret and was considered the ultimate *muvaḥḥid*. Perhaps he was elevating his rank to that of Iblīs and claiming that he had gained his rank because of his prayers and that there was no longer any degree of separation between him and God; hence, not only was there no need for him to prostrate himself in prayers—just as Iblīs had refused—but he must also be the subject of other people's prostration because he went from the rank of *sājid* to the rank of *masjūd*. This claim was perhaps even more blasphemous than that of Iblīs, who refused to prostrate himself before Adam on the grounds that he was better than him; but Burhān al-Dīn Muḥaqqiq went even further, claiming that he had reached the stage of divinity, and therefore he must be the object of everyone's prostration. Such

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[675] Muḥaqqiq Tirmiẕī, *Maqālāt*, 32.

claims had been made about Iblīs by al-Ḥallāj and ʿAyn al-Qużāt, with emphasis on Iblīs's *tauḥīd* and his resultant stance of having no need to bow down before anyone. Perhaps Burhān al-Dīn Muḥaqqiq also believed in such Divine unity, and in that regard, he emulated the example of Iblīs in refusing to prostrate himself.

5.3.1.3 Shams-i Tabrīzī (d. ca. 645/1247)

The most influential spiritual master in Rūmī's life was Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Malikdād Tabrīzī. The time that Rūmī and Shams spent together was rather short, around three years, after which Shams suddenly disappeared; but their time together created a lasting impact on Rūmī's mystical worldview, which is reflected in his writings. There is little information about the life of Shams before he met Rūmī. He was a traveling Sufi whose journey took him from his birthplace, Tabrīz, first to Syria, then to southern Anatolia, and finally to Konya, where he met Rūmī in 641/1244. As Devin DeWeese argues, on the basis of the biographies provided by ʿAbd al-Raḥmān Jāmī (d. 898/1492) and Kamāl al-Dīn Ḥusayn Kh^{w}ārazmī (d. 839/1436), Shams was the student of Bābā Kāmil Jandī (d. 672/1273) who belonged to the Kubraviyya Sufi order.[676]

Since Shams did not leave behind any writings, the best source that provides a glimpse into his mystical views is the compilation of his discourses entitled *Maqālāt*. His views on Iblīs show that he was exceedingly curious about him, and there are several references to him in the *Maqālāt*. In one passage Shams cites a conversation between two anonymous people regarding the nature of Iblīs. The first person believed that "the essence of Iblīs is uncreated" (*maʿnī-yi Iblīs ḥādiṯ nīst*) even though his "form" (*ṣūrat*) was created. The second person said that this was "unbelief" (*kufr*),

[676] Devin A. DeWeese, "The Kashf al-Hudā of Kamāl ad-Dīn Ḥusayn Khorezmī: A Fifteenth- Century Sufi Commentary of the Qaṣidat al-Burdah in Khorezmian Turkic" (PhD diss., Indiana University, 1985), 79–80.

but the first person believed that this was the core of in Islam is belief because the *maʿnī* of Iblīs had existed in God's knowledge (*ʿilm-i Allāh*) before He created his physical form.[677] Therefore, it appears that Shams himself was leaning more toward the first person's belief, namely that Iblīs was uncreated and therefore divine.

Shams also suggested that Iblīs could act as a hidden saint. He relates a story about a man who repented of his past sins and went on pilgrimage to Mecca but became lost from his caravan and was wandering in the desert. When he saw a person coming from afar, he prayed to God, saying: "By the grace (*ḥurmat*) of this man, Khiżr, who is coming toward me, please rescue me."[678] The man reached him and guided him through the desert until he caught up with his caravan. As they were about to depart, the pilgrim asked the guide: "By God, who is without peer, tell me who you are that you appear to be so sagacious?" The guide refused to say, and instead said: "You have escaped affliction (*balā*) and gotten your wish; why do you care about my identity?" The pilgrim told him: "By God, I will not let you go until you tell me." Finally the guide gave up and said: "I am Iblīs, whom the children in their book [i.e. the Qurʾan] read as 'and upon you is My curse (Q 38:78)'." Shams then concludes: "Anyone who has faith (*iʿtiqād*) in Iblīs and looks to him with faith can achieve what he desires, and the one who looks to the Prophet [Muḥammad] without *iʿtiqād* becomes debased and lost like Abū Jahl."[679] Therefore, for Shams, Iblīs can act as a hidden saint like Khiżr, and as long as a person has firm faith, he will become his guide. The choice of the Qurʾanic verse is telling. While there are numerous references in the Qurʾan to the story of Iblīs, Shams chose the Iblisophile Sufis' most beloved verse, which in their view describes God's

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[677] Shams al-Dīn Muḥammad Tabrīzī, *Maqālāt-i Shams-i Tabrīzī*, ed. Muḥammad ʿAlī Muvaḥḥid (Tehran: Khʷārazmī, 1377/1998), 1:73.

[678] Shams Tabrīzī, *Maqālāt*, 1:264–65.

[679] Shams Tabrīzī, *Maqālāt*, 1:265.

secret love for Iblīs. Perhaps Shams was hinting that because Iblīs was uniquely separated from the rest of creation by God's personal curse ("My curse"), he could act as a mystical guide to the select few who believed in his divine nature.

In several passages of the *Māqālāt*, Shams states that the true nature of Iblīs is unknown to most people because "this Satan is not the same as the Turkmān with the tall hat which they [i.e. painters] often draw."[680] This is perhaps the only reference in classical Persian literature to the drawing of the "Devil's" picture. Shams believed that Iblīs was a spiritual essence (*maʿnavī*), which according to a prophetic hadith, flows like blood in a human's veins and therefore cannot have a physical form.[681] That is why people are incapable (*ʿājiz*) of comprehending the truth (*ḥaqīqat*) about Iblīs.[682] In another passage, Shams relates that even Muḥammad wished to see the form (*ṣūrat*) of Iblīs. Apparently, when someone asked Shams why Muḥammad, who had seen God, wanted to see Iblīs, he answered: "Because when Iblīs, who is of the spiritual realm (*maʿnavī*), wants to come into a physical form, he takes the shape of ʿImād (Shams's rival) to make you disheartened."[683] Therefore, for Shams, Iblīs could outwardly take the form of any human, and this view was later echoed by Rūmī, who states in the *Maṯnavī-yi maʿnavī*:

> Since many an Iblīs has the face of Adam
> It is not advisable to give the hand of friendship to any random person.[684]

Rūmī, who took his general worldview from Shams, had a balanced admiration for Iblīs as can be seen in his magnum opus, the *Maṯnavī-yi maʿnavī*.

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[680] Shams Tabrīzī, *Maqālāt*, 1:214.

[681] Shams Tabrīzī, *Maqālāt*, 1:214; 2:164. The hadith, which is in *Ṣaḥiḥ Muslim*, the Book of Greetings, states: "Verily Satan flows in the son of Adam like blood." See, Abū al-Ḥusayn b. al-Hajjāj al-Qushayrī Muslim al-Nīshābūrī. *Ṣaḥīh Muslim*, ed. Muḥammad Fuʾād ʿAbd al-Bāqī (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-ʿIlmiyya, 1412/1991), 4:1712.

[682] Shams Tabrīzī, *Maqālāt*, 2:164.

[683] Shams Tabrīzī, *Maqālāt*, 2:338.

[684] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 1, line 316, p. 18.

5.4 Iblīs in Rūmī's Writings

5.4.1 *Majālis-i sabʿa*, *Fīhi mā fīhi*

As in the case of his father and teachers, Rūmī's first work was a collection of his sermons, which was compiled under the title *Majālis-i sabʿa* (The seven sermons), and scholars generally agree that these sermons were given before the appearance of Shams in his life. The references to Iblīs in *Majālis-i sabʿa* resemble those of his father; they are without esoteric meaning and are often negative. Although in one instance, Rūmī appears to have a quasi-positive view of Iblīs:

> Do you not see that when God said to the angels: "Instead of Me, prostrate yourselves before Adam, this was in fact an exoteric command to turn their backs away from serving God and toward someone other than God. However, since this was in accordance with the command, it was indeed turning toward God, and it was even more significant than that. Why more significant? Because they had prostrated themselves before God for many years, but they were not distinguished from the stranger (i.e., Iblīs), as they shared the same food and [Sufi] robe with Iblīs (*bā Iblīs ham-kāsa wa ham-khirqa būdand*). With this act of turning away from God and facing Adam, they were given the robe of honor in being distinguished from the stranger. And although Iblīs never turned his back on God and did not feel any reservation in prostrating himself before God, he disdained prostrating himself before another; but since he

turned his back on God's command, when he looked, he saw his face was directed opposite [to God].[685]

While this is generally taken as a condemnation of Iblīs for disobeying God's command, Rūmī admits that Iblīs never objected to prostrating himself to God, but rather abhorred doing so to anyone other than Him.

5.4.2 *Dīvān-i kabīr*

The *Dīvān-i kabīr*, also known as *Dīvān-i Shams-i Tabrīzī*, is the compendium of Rūmī's lyrical poetry (*ghazals*). These *ghazal*s were recited from the time Rūmī met Shams until Rūmī's death. The references to Iblīs in the *Dīvān* are numerous and mostly negative. But there are a few references that are either positive or ambiguous. One of the more interesting is in a long mystical *ghazal* which describes an argument between God and Iblīs. However, before the argument begins, in the middle of the *ghazal*, Rūmī describes a mysterious being:

God has a star that wanders around the earth
Of whom the sun and the blue firmament are desirous.

There are many dawns when he comes into the monastery of the believer,
Saying that I am the lucky star *(sitāra-yi saʿd*)! Seek the goal through me.

I am a star who is on earth as well as in the firmament,
I am found in hundreds of stages like the imagination of the [beautiful] face.

I am the candle for the earthly ones, and I am illumination for the heavenly ones,
I am the spirit for the angels and existence for the star.

Even though I appear as a speck [of dust] (*ẕarra*), I am the sun,
Although I appear as a fraction, to me belongs the totality.

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[685] Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Balkhī Rūmī, *Majālis-i sabʿa: Haft khitāba*, ed. Taufīq Subḥānī (Tehran: Kayhān 1365/1986), 163.

Although the direction of supplication has been heaven,
Do not look toward heaven; look at me and see the benevolence.

One is ashamed of him, out of jealousy and rivalry,
The way Iblīs did, stating that "God suffices as the subject of one's prostration."

Adam tells him: "This prostration is for His sake,
You see two because you have become double-visioned, and due to ignorance and animosity."[686]

Up to this point, it is not clear who this star is whom Rūmī is describing. But some of the description fits Iblīs. For instance, everyone assumes that he is as worthless as an "speck of dust" (*ẕarra*), but he claims to be the sun. He is like a star, a wanderer in both heaven and earth, and he goes to monasteries (*ṣauma'a*). As has been amply shown, Iblīs was understood as having visited Sufi lodges and monasteries many times to guide Sufis. This star is the spirit of the angels and he has hundreds of ranks. The descriptions by which Iblīs is portrayed as the master of thousands of angels are numerous. Rūmī finishes this part of the *ghazal* with direct reference to Iblīs, who saw God as the only being worthy of his prostration, even when Adam reminded him of his error.

As Rūmī continues the *ghazal*, he describes that everything is behind a veil (*parda*) and that is why one cannot understand the esoteric dimension of events:

God made a veil out of the dust of "how" and "why,"
And placed it between the star of felicity and the eye of the jealous person.

The star says: "May this veil of yours become even greater,
It is not only I who abandon you but also you [who] are rejected by the Lord."

There are many questions and answers within this veil,
It was on the account of this veil that Nimrud could not fully see Abraham.[687]

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[686] Rūmī, *Dīvān*, no. 914, lines 13–20, p. 368.
[687] Rūmī, *Dīvān*, no. 914, lines 20–23, p. 368.

Then Rūmī goes into a detailed description of the veil between two friends, among them God and Iblīs:

> O God! What is this veil of jealousy between two friends
> Who yesterday were as intimate as soulmates and now they are like vengeful wolves?
>
> What was the veil because before [the appearance of] this veil Iblīs
> Traversed on the rooftop of heaven and earth while prostrating himself.
>
> With enthusiasm and joy, with tenderness and supplication,
> With all variety of litanies, he added his love [for God].
>
> On the account of the veil of jealousy, he became like a donkey on ice,
> He soiled his angelic wings with excrement.
>
> He was banished from the mosque of the firmament [by God who said:] "Be gone! You have been soiled with excrement,"
> He did not listen and kept sifting through the excrement.
>
> [Saying,] "Why should I go? For what reason? What did I do?
> Come and let us debate, O unique and singular Lord.
>
> If this was done by Your hand because everything is Your doing,
> [Including] the error and dualism and being Christian and Jew,
>
> Why did You lead me astray? This was Your desire!
> I will do such a feat that You shall not see one person blessed."[688]

In response, God tells Iblīs that "you are not worthy of debating Me and anyone who follows you will be an ass who is cut off from Me."[689] This exchange is simply the extended version of what the Qurʾan states and with what Rūmī's audience was familiar. Therefore, there seems to be no great lesson given in this part. What is significant, however, is how to connect the first part of the *ghazal*, which discusses the qualities of the mysterious and wandering star, to the second part. One can hypothesize that the link between these seemingly different parts is the section which discusses

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[688] Rūmī, *Dīvān*, no. 914, lines 24–31, pp. 368–69.
[689] Rūmī, *Dīvān*, no. 914, lines 34, p. 369.

the mysteries of the veil (*parda*). Rūmī believes that this *parda* is the source of bewilderment which does not allow people to distinguish the star, who, like Abraham, is the true friend of God. This *parda,* which is made of the why and how (*chūn va chirā*), stemming from the intellect, works as a barrier against mystical vision. Exoterically, Rūmī is suggesting that it was because of this *parda* that Iblīs, who was the worthiest of God's servants, was sullied by the metaphorical "excrement" (*ḥadaṣ*) of jealousy (*ḥasad*); and to add insult to injury, he challenged God to a debate (*baḥṣ*). Yet if one interprets these verses esoterically, they might suggest that it was also because of this *parda*, raised perhaps by God, that we are unable to see that the anonymous star shares many characteristics of Iblīs. The "two friends who were soulmates," "but now are like two vengeful wolves," perhaps symbolizing God and Iblīs, appear this way to most people only because there is a *parda* before their eyes, and they are unable to fathom the esoteric reality behind it. As Rūmī alludes, all we see is that Iblīs, who worshipped and loved God unconditionally, became jealous, and God banished him, but what is behind the veil is unfathomable to most. That is why the first part of this ghazal is also a "veiled speech" (*sukhan dar parda*). Furthermore, while Adam tells Iblīs that he is cross-eyed (*aḥval va dau-bīn*), in fact he is telling humans that it is because of our veil of animosity toward Iblīs that we see him and God as two separate entities, while in reality they are in union.

The poetry of Rūmī is perhaps the best of its kind in Persian literature when it comes to instilling hope in its audience, and the same hopefulness can be seen when Rūmī speaks about the fate of Iblīs. For instance, in a *ghazal* in the *Dīvān*, he states:

> Through [the saying] "My devil became Muslim," your ego became Lordly,
> Iblīs became Muslim, may it continue to be so.[690]

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[690] Rūmī, *Dīvān*, no. 82, line 15, p. 80.

In this *ghazal*, Rūmī is referring to a hadith that states: "There is a devil with everyone including me, but with the help of God, I converted my devil to Islam."[691] Rūmī mentions the part in which Muḥammad states, "My devil became Muslim (*aslama shayṭānī*)" in his poem as a glad tiding, namely that even Iblīs will eventually be rehabilitated. A similar example provided in a *ghazal*, in which Rūmī, in reference to the mercy of God, states:

> Iblīs does not sever his hope from Your kindness,
> In every moment, a new hope shines within him.[692]

In another *ghazal*, Rūmī echoes the same theme:

> When the cypress tree of [God's] mercy struts toward the garden,
> Will the cured Iblīs [finally] find faith? Yes![693]

Rūmī believed that when the divine wine intoxicates the individual, it will wash away all evil and grant purity to the soul. That is why he recites in a *ghazal*:

> On account of an abundance of wine, Iblīs became like Adam
> [Therefore,] Iblīs's curse has become mixed with [God's].[694]

Here, Rūmī goes beyond referring to the fact that the divine wine purifies evil. The *ghazal* also alludes to what al-Ḥallāj and ʿAyn al-Qużāt mentioned, namely, by cursing Iblīs God also made him his select among all creation, and that it was not only prophets like Adam or Muḥammad whom God named as His chosen (*aṣtafā*).

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[691] Muslim, *Ṣaḥīḥ*, 2168.
[692] Rūmī, *Dīvān*, no. 1028, line 6, p. 409.
[693] Rūmī, *Dīvān*, no. 2896, line 5, p. 1072.
[694] Rūmī, *Dīvān*, no. 2371, line 9, p. 883.

In Rūmī's *Fihi mā fihi,* which is collection of his discourses compiled in prose after the departure of Shams from Konya, there are few, again mostly negative, references to Iblīs. In one, however, Iblīs is depicted as a naïve observer:

> When God created Adam from mud and water as [the *hadith* states] "He kneaded the clay of Adam for forty days," God finished making the form of Adam which was left on earth for a while. Iblīs the Accursed descended to earth and went inside Adam's form and went through all the veils and observed it and witnessed all those veins and bloody tendons and humors and said: "Oh! It is no wonder that the Iblīs, whom I have come to know at the feet of God's throne, must appear. If it is not this one (i.e., Adam's form), then it would be a surprise, because if Iblīs exists, he must be this one."[695]

This passage, while intended to serve as a warning for those who think themselves superior to others, also makes the reader sympathetic toward Iblīs. Before the angel ʿAzāzīl became Iblīs, he supposedly read in the divine tablet (*lauḥ*) that a devilish creature by the name of Iblīs would rise against God and would become damned. Upon seeing the physical form of Adam, which consisted of decaying flesh, ʿAzāzīl deduced that Iblīs must be this creature. While Rūmī does not draw any conclusion from this passage, the story depicts Iblīs not as a cunning figure, but as an innocent angel who could not even dream of becoming the accursed Devil about whom he was foretold.

5.4.3 *Maṯnavī-yi maʿnavī*

The last work of Rūmī was his magnum opus, *Maṯnavī-yi maʿnavī*, which he began composing roughly around 656/1258 and continued until the end of his life. The *Maṯnavī* is in poetic form of

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[695] Rūmī, *Fīhi mā fīhi*, 40.

rhyming couplets and consists of six books (*daftar*). When it comes to Rūmī's Iblisology, the *Maṯnavī* appears to be the most mature expression of his mystical vision. While the stories about Iblīs in the *Maṯnavī* appear to be somewhat original, Rūmī's poetic art lies not in introducing new stories and topics, but in twisting and reshaping the old but already familiar stories into something completely esoteric and mystical, in ways that no one had done before. Although some of the elements in these stories are not new, what makes them fascinating is the fact that it seems that these stories appear for the first time in the *Maṯnavī*; and more importantly, the language that Rūmī used in interpreting and unraveling the mysteries of these often-simple tales became his trademark.

The length of the stories about Iblīs varies throughout the *Maṯnavī*. The first complete story is in book one of the *Maṯnavī*, and although it is short, it has profound mystical meaning. The title of story is: "The Astonishment of Adam at the deviation (*żilālat*) of the cursed Iblīs and becoming haughty." As Rūmī relates:

> Once, Adam looked at Iblīs, who was wretched,
> With the gaze of condescension and mockery.
>
> He became self-absorbed and egotistical
> And he mocked the state of the accursed Iblīs
>
> At that moment, God, out of jealousy (*ghayrat*) [for Iblīs], cried out: "O chosen one (*ṣafī*) (i.e., Adam)!
> You do not know about the hidden secrets (*asrār-i khafī*)!
>
> *If he (i.e., Iblīs) turns his felt cloak (*pūstīn*) inside out,
> He can uproot the mountain from top to bottom.
>
> *In that instant, he can rend the veil (*parda*) of a hundred Adams,
> And he will bring forth a hundred Iblīses who have converted to Islam (*ṣad bilīs-i nau musalmān āvarad*)."
>
> [Upon hearing this,] Adam said: "I repent from such a gaze!
> Such shameless thoughts will not come to my mind ever again."[696]

[696] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk.1 lines 3893–98, p. 172.

There have been several translations of this tale into English by various translators including Reynold Nicholson, Alan Williams, and Jawid Mojaddedi. In Nicholson's and Williams's translations of verses 3896–97 (indicated *), it is God, and not Iblīs, who if He were to "turn the fur inside out" (Nicholson), or "reveal His other aspect" (Williams), would perform such a miracle with the mountain.[697] Mojaddedi, on the other hand, believes that these verses refer to Adam who is threatened by God to "turn his waistcoat inside out."[698] In general, among these three translations, only Nicholson's is closest to the Persian original. The assertion that these verses refer to God and not Iblīs is also repeated in various ways by most medieval and modern commentators of the *Maṯnavī*. However, Karīm Zamānī is one of the few modern scholars of Rūmī who believes that these verses are about Iblīs and not God.[699]

In terms of sentence structure and language, the claim that it was God or His jealousy who threatens to turn His *pūstīn* inside out makes little sense. In the previous verse (*Maṯnavī* bk.1, line 3895), God, out of jealousy begins to speak to Adam by addressing him directly and referring to him as You (*tau namīdānī za asrār-i khafī*!). It is highly irregular that in the next verse (*Maṯnavī* bk.1, line 3896), instead of referring to Himself in the first person, God should refer to Himself in the third person saying: *pūstin rā bāj-gūna gar kunad* / *kūh rā az bīkh va az bun bar kanad* when the meter permits the verse to be in the first person (*kunam*) instead of third person (*kunad*). Furthermore, the imagery of the story does not support the interpretation that God is referring to

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[697] *The Mathnawí of Jalálu'ddín Rúmí*, trans. Reynold A. Nicholson, vol 1, containing translation of the first and second books (London: Cambridge University Press for the Trustees of the E. J. W. Gibb Memorial, 1926), bk. 1, line 3896, p. 211; Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Balkhī Rūmī, *The Masnavi of Rumi: Book One*. trans. Alan Williams, vol.1 (London: I. B. Tauris, 2020), bk. 1, line 3911, p. 255.

[698] Jalāl al-Dīn Muḥammad Balkhī Rūmī, *The Masnavi: Book One.* trans. Jawid Mojaddedi, vol 1. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), bk 1, line 3911, p. 237.

[699] Karīm Zamānī, *Sharḥ-i jamiʿ-i Maṯnavī-yi maʿnavī*: *Daftar-i avval*. vol 1. 53rd ed. (Tehran: Iṭṭilāʿāt, 1398/2019), 1:1102.

Himself in this verse. It is without precedent for Rūmī to attribute *pūstīn* to God, yet for Iblīs who is known to be a *pīr*, to have a felt cloak is a very familiar image. While one cannot completely dismiss the claim that it is God who is going to turn the *pūstīn* inside out, it is highly improbable and therefore the more logical reading of this verse is that God is warning Adam that he should not ridicule Iblīs's exoteric state because if he turns his *pūstīn* inside out (i.e., reveals his esoteric and angelic being), he will be capable of performing wonderous acts, one of which is to reveal the secret of Adam.

The first thing that draws the reader's attention in these verses is the staggering number of mystical idioms employed, even by Rūmī's standards. In contrast to the traditional and Qurʾanic story concerning Adam and Iblīs, the roles of the two are reversed. It is Adam who is self-absorbed (*khʷīsh bīn*) and egotistic (*khʷud guzīn*), characteristics which had traditionally been regarded as the main reason for Iblīs's downfall and which Sufis considered to be among the most heinous of flaws. In this story, however, it is God who shows jealousy (*ghayrat*) for Iblīs. God has the Divine attribute of being jealous (*al-ghayyūr*), and according to mystics, He does not allow his lovers to have any beloved except Him. This being said, in many of Rūmī's poems, this term is used when God wants to conceal something or someone from the eyes of the unworthy He conceals it under the veil of jealousy (*parda-yi ghayrat*) and any secret that is not to be revealed is hidden behind it.[700] But why does God have *ghayrat* for Iblīs? One might look at *ghaza*l of the *Dīvān* in which Rūmī indicates that, out of *ghayrat,* God (represented here by love) makes the lover look like the enemy to everyone else and only when the lover is rejected by the masses (*khalq*) will love embrace him, because as long as one is accepted by the masses, one is not worthy of the King of Love.[701]

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[700] Rūmī, *Dīvān*, no. 100, line 10, p. 86, no. 218, lines 1–2, p. 130, no. 511, line 3, p. 230, no. 1100, line 8, pp. 435–36.

[701] Rūmī, *Dīvān*, no. 742, line 1, p. 308.

This allusion fits perfectly with the situation of Iblīs, who is the subject of God's *ghayrat*. In this scenario, God is the lover and He cannot tolerate His beloved to be even known by anyone other than Himself. In a controversial passage in *Fihī mā fīhi*, Rūmī states:

> There are some servants who are the beloveds and darlings [of God]. God Almighty is seeking them and performs everything that is a lover's duty for them…. If I were to undertake expounding on this, even the saints who have attained union with the Divine would be lost in bafflement. How can I then explain such secrets and mystical states to common people?[702]

Therefore, while God as a Beloved is jealous that His lovers should not look at anyone but Him, in this new and mystical capacity as a Lover, he is jealous in the manner that first, no one should know His beloved, and second, that no one should dare to mock or insult His beloved. This view is perhaps taken and then extended from the famous *hadith qudsī* in which God says: "My [real] saints are [hidden] under My domes and no one except Me knows them."[703] As a hidden saint, Iblīs fits perfectly Rūmī's description of God's love for His 'servant,' and therefore God is justified in showing *ghayrat* for Iblīs.

While in other parts of the *Maṯnavī* Rūmī states that it was Iblīs who was blind to the true essence of Adam and therefore arrogantly refused to prostrate himself before him, in this tale it is Adam who was blind to the secret of Iblīs. But what is that secret? Is it the secret agreement between God and Iblīs mentioned by ʿAyn al-Qużāt and ʿAṭṭār?

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[702] Rūmī, *Fīhi mā fīhi*, 118.
[703] Hujvīrī, *Kashf al-maḥjūb*, 70.

In this tale, Iblīs has a *pūstīn*, which according to God, if he wears it inside out (*bājgūna*), he can do such and such miracles. The meaning of *pūstīn* is fur or pelt or even leather in general, but one does not have to look hard in Sufi literature to find that this word means a woollen cloak, which was the standard clothing of Sufis. In ʿAṭṭār's *Taẕkirat al-auliyāʾ*, the references to *pūstīn* as a Sufi cloak are numerous, including in the chapters on Ḥabīb-i ʿAjamī (d. ca. 132/750), Abū Saʿīd Abū al-Khayr, and most importantly, Bāyazīd Basṭāmī. In the chapter dedicated to Bāyazīd Basṭāmī, he is depicted as a Sufi who wore a tattered *pūstīn* and it was reportedly said that after forty years of ascetic practices (*riyāżāt*), the veils of ignorance were removed, and he begged to be allowed to enter God's presence. God told him: "As long as you hold on to your possessions, namely the tattered *pūstīn* and the broken water jug, you may not enter."[704] A more interesting note in the same chapter is that when Bāyazīd was at the end of his life, he went out, bought a girdle worn by non-Muslims (*zunnār*), and wore his *pūstīn* inside out (*bājgūna*), claiming to be a Zoroastrian (*gabr*) who wanted to convert to true Islam.[705] This resembles ʿAyn al-Qużāt saying that one must become a true unbeliever before one can become a true Muslim.[706] All these references to *pūstīn*-wearing Sufis who were often *malāmatīs* in their behaviour (not to be confused with belonging to the Malāmatiyya Order) suggest that at least on one level, Rūmī viewed Iblīs as a hidden mystic who wore his *pūstīn* inside out to cloak his true identity, but at the same time, only God knew that by turning his *pūstīn* inside out, he could reveal his miraculous powers.

The first result of turning the *pūstīn* inside out, which is indicative of the transformation of Iblīs into his true self, was the destruction of the mountains. For Rūmī, the shattering of the

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[704] ʿAṭṭār, *Taẕkirat al-auliyāʾ*, 1:182.
[705] ʿAṭṭār, *Taẕkirat al-auliyāʾ*, 1:202.
[706] ʿAyn al-Qużāt, *Tamhīdāt*, 204–7.

mountain always alluded to Qurʾan 7:143 concerning Moses and the vision of God. [707] According to this Qurʾanic verse, when Moses asked God whether he could see him, God revealed Himself to a mountain and the mountain became shattered by the sight of God. If the first secret was that Iblīs is a pelt-wearing saint (*pūstīn pūsh*), the second secret is that by showing his true essence, his epiphanic manifestation (*tajallī*) is either as powerful as God's or he himself is an emanation of the Divine.

As if those two secrets were not enough, Iblīs is also capable of rending (*bar darīdan*) the veil of a hundred Adams. In one of the Qurʾanic tales regarding the creation of Adam, when the angels asked God the reason for the creation of Adam, He responded: "I know something that you do not know (Q 2:30)," hence alluding to a secret associated with the creation of Adam that, at least from a Qurʾanic point of view, was never revealed to the angels or to Adam himself. Yet speaking on behalf of God, Rūmī informs the reader that Iblīs knows the secret associated with Adam and is capable of revealing it in an "instant" (*dam*), the atomistic measure of time in Sufism. It seems that this secret resembles the secret in the *Ganj-nāma* mentioned in ʿAṭṭār's *Taẕkirat al-auliyāʾ,* known only to God and Iblīs.

Rūmī goes on to say that the archetypal Iblīs is capable of producing hundreds of newly converted Iblīses (*ṣad bilīs-i nau musalmān āvarad*). The interesting point here is the expression "newly converted," which implies that Iblīs is capable of converting even the most ardent unbelievers to Islam. According to the Qurʾan, real conversion only happens through God, and even Muḥammad is told that he does not have the power over an individual's conversion: "Indeed, [O Muḥammad], you do not guide whom you will, but God guides whom He wills (Q 28:56)";

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[707] Rūmī, *Dīvān*, no. 14, line 9, p. 54, no. 33, line 16, pp. 62–63, no. 401, line 6, p. 190, no. 544, line 1, p. 241, no. 811, line 6, p. 331.

also "So remember, [O Muḥammad]; you are only a reminder. You do not have any power over them (Q 88:21–22)." Yet Iblīs, it seems, has the power of converting even Iblīs-like creatures to Islam, which again alludes to the fact that his divine powers are beyond the imagination of Adam. That is why in the end, Adam repents of even thinking of mocking Iblīs.

The second and longest tale about Iblīs in the *Maṯnavī* is in book two verses 2604–2792. The tale is about the encounter between Iblīs and Muʿāviya (d. 60/680), the first Umayyad caliph. The story begins with Muʿāviya closing the doors of his palace at the end of a day from inside (*az andarūn*), perhaps an allusion to his innate blindness or closed heartedness. Yet Iblīs was able to find a way into the palace and take the form of a man. In describing Iblīs, Rūmī uses the word "man" (*mard*) twice, a typical mystical reference to Sufis, i.e., *mardān* (i.e., real men). When Muʿāviya asked the person's name, he replied: "I am Iblīs and I have woken you up because if I had not, you were going to be late for the obligatory prayer."[708] In his attempt to convince Muʿāviya that he truly woke him up because the prayer time was expiring, Iblīs even indicated his respect for Muḥammad by using his honorific title "Muṣṭafā," and quoted a *hadith* which enjoins Muslims to rush to their prayers before the time expires. Muʿāviya did not believe that Iblīs was capable of performing any meritorious act and started to ask him about his real intentions. The rest of the tale takes the form of a conversation between the two in which Iblīs tries to convince Muʿāviya of his good intentions. Iblīs begins this long dialogue by introducing himself:

> Iblīs said: "I was an angel since the beginning,
> I have traversed the path of worship and obedience [toward God] with all my soul.
>
> I had been the close confidant of the seekers on the path,
> And I was the soulmate of those who resided around the Throne of God (ʿarsh).

[708] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 2 lines 2612–14, p. 288.

Will one's heart ever forget the first occupation?
Will the first love ever leave one's heart?

If on your travels you see Rūm or Khutan
Will you ever forget the love of your homeland (*ḥubb al-vaṭan*)?

I too have been intoxicated by this [Divine] wine
I too have been a lover at His gate.

My umbilical cord was cut in accordance with His love
His love has been planted in my soul.

I have seen many good days [in His company]
I have drunk the water of [His] mercy in the spring season.

Is it not true that His gracious hand planted me?
Did He not bring me forth from non-existence?

I have seen much caressing from Him
I have walked around in the rose-garden of contentment.

He would put the hand of mercy on my head
He made the springs of kindness flow for me.

When I was only a suckling child
Who would rock my cradle other than He?

Whose milk did I suckle other than His milk?
Who nourished me other than His providence?

How can the temperament which goes into the body with that milk
Ever be separated from people?"[709]

In the first set of these conversations, Iblīs reveals that at the beginning (*avval*) he was an obedient angel, and that he was the intimate companion (*maḥram*) of the seekers on the path (*sālikān-i rāh*). The "beginning" (*avval*) is a central concept in the mystic's vocabulary, and especially for Rūmī, as it denotes the origin of all relations and existence that Sufis had with God before creation. In the *Fīhi mā fihi*, Rūmī stresses that those who have the *avval* in their minds are the special ones:

[709] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 2 lines 2617–29, p. 289.

> An ascetic (*zāhid*) is the person who sees the end (*ākhir*) and the masses see only the stable (*ākhur*). But those who are the chosen ones and gnostics (*akhaṣṣ va ʿārifān*) see neither *ākhir* nor *ākhur*, because their vision (*naẓar*) has seen the beginning (*avval*)… when they have seen the *avval*, they do not need to know the *ākhir*, and the end is completely revealed to them from the beginning. These are unique and rare individuals.[710]

It is based on this mode of thinking that Rūmī asks whether it is ever possible to erase from the heart one's first occupation (*pīsha-yi avval*) or first love (*mihr-i avval*).[711] While on one level this verse refers to Iblīs and his first love and his first occupation, it can also be a reference to mankind in general or even to Rūmī himself. After all, these verses, and many of the verses in this conversation which are the lamentation of Iblīs about the separation from the source of all goodness, are reminiscent of the *Nay-nāma* at the beginning of the *Maṯnavī.*

From this passage, it can also be deduced that Rūmī views Iblīs's separation from God in the same light as his own separation from his homeland. The verse where Iblīs talks about Rūm or Khutan can be first interpreted as Rūmī's love for his homeland despite living in Rūm for so long; but on the esoteric level, for Sufis the phrase "love of homeland" (*ḥubb al-waṭan*) always denoted not the physical but the spiritual longing for the realm of the Divine, i.e., the original homeland of the soul. This is emblematic of Rūmī's poetry where he himself assumes the role of the protagonist and starts to speak on his behalf. To speak with the tongue of Iblīs, however, could mean that at least on one level, Rūmī empathized with him and shared the pain of separation which is common to Iblīs and man. It is interesting to note that Rūmī uses the word "us" (*mā*) whenever

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[710] Rūmī, *Fīhi mā fīhi*, 33.
[711] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 2, line 2619, p. 289.

Iblīs is referring to himself, as opposed to "I," which Iblīs traditionally used to refer to himself (e.g., "I am better than him. You have created Me from fire" (Q 38:76). It seems that by departing from the orthodox exegesis about Iblīs, Rūmī sees no distinction between any of the lovers of God who are afflicted by the pain of separation and longing for reunion, be it Iblīs or the perfect man.

Rūmī depicts God as a merciful gardener who planted the seed of His love in the soul of Iblīs with the hand of grace (*fażl*), gave the water of mercy to it in the spring, caressed (*navāzish*) him many times, and has been strolling with him in the "rose garden of contentment" (*gulistān-i riżā*).[712] Iblīs not only does not harbor any animosity toward God, but he has fond memories and is thankful for everything God has done for him. Iblīs also depicts God as a kind wet-nurse (*dāya*) and also a midwife who cut his umbilical cord in accordance with His own love, and whose kind hand rocked his cradle when he was still a suckling infant (*shīr-jū*). Iblīs asks: "From whose milk did I drink other than His milk? Who nourished me except His providence?"[713] He concludes that because the kind temperament which has entered into his being was determined by that Divine milk, it cannot be altered in any way.[714] God also assumes the role of supreme nourisher (*parvardigār*), whose constant attention and mercy was given to Iblīs and in turn Iblīs became the loyal servant of God.

There is a subtle reason why Iblīs describes his origin and pedigree to Muʿāviya . He declares himself to be of angelic origin and as one who was nursed directly by God. While one might find the whole nursing image symbolic (despite Rūmī's insistence on saying God suckled Iblīs in *Maṯnavī* 2:2627–29), Rūmī is perhaps trying to prove a point here. One should also

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[712] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 2, line 2625, p. 289.
[713] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 2, lines 2627–28, p. 289.
[714] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 2, line 2629, p. 289.

remember to whom Iblīs was bragging about his lineage and origin. Muʿāviya was the son of Abū Sufyān, the head of the Quraysh clan in Mecca and the archenemy of Muḥammad. Abū Sufyān had converted to Islam out of expediency only after he was defeated by Muḥammad after the conquest of Mecca in 8/630. That is the genius of Rūmī, who juxtaposes two completely different characters: one with the highest angelic background, nursed and nurtured by God who fell out of grace; with one whose father was Abū Sufyān and whose mother was Hind bint ʿUtba, one the most despised female figures in the time of Muḥammad. That is why for Rūmī, who repeatedly shows in his works that the origin and root (*aṣl*) of someone are a significant factor in determining a person's deeds, Muʿāviya was chosen to be the opposite of Iblīs.

Following this initial introduction, Iblīs describes the circumstances surrounding his downfall:

> If the Ocean of Munificence (i.e., God) scolded [me],
> When will the gates of munificence ever be closed?
>
> His true currency is justice and kindness (*luṭf*) and mercy,
> Severity (*qahr*) is nothing more than a haze of dust on it.
>
> Kindness was the reason that He made the world,
> The specks [of dust] were caressed by His sunlight.
>
> If the separation [from Him] has become burdened [even further] with His severity,
> It is this way, so that the value of union with Him may be appreciated.
>
> So that separation from Him may chastise the soul,
> And the soul knows the value of the time of union.
>
> The Prophet states that God said:
> "My purpose for the creation was to show beneficence.
>
> I have created [people] so that they may benefit from Me,
> So that they may smear their hand with My nectar [i.e. enjoy the bounty I created for them].

> [I created] not for My own benefit
> And not to tear off the robe from the person who is naked [i.e. not to gain something from them]."
>
> In these few days that He has banished me from His presence,
> My eyes keep gazing at His beautiful countenance.
>
> [Wondering] that from such [a beautiful] face such severity is a strange thing,
> Everyone is busy with finding the cause [for this].
>
> I do not look at the cause (*sabab*), because that is created
> And every created cause (*ḥādiṯ*) is followed by another.
>
> I gaze upon the uncreated eternal kindness.
> And I rend asunder any created cause.[715]

Through the words of the protagonist, Rūmī reminds the reader that the nature of Iblīs's banishment and exile (*firāq*) was not unlike man's exile. Here, Iblīs is no longer talking about his own experience, but the idea of *firāq* in general. According to this narrative, if people associate their own banishment with God's vengeance and chastisement, it is only so that they may appreciate the value of union (*vaṣl*). This concept is also attested in Rūmī's *Dīvān*:

> You (i.e., God) made the form of angels and mixed it with water and clay
> You have cast me far away so that I may [one day] become the elixir of closeness.[716]

These verses have a multi-dimensional meaning and often paradoxical interpretation, and indeed Iblīs and his ordeal became the symbol of any spiritual lover who was separated from the Beloved. But how can the reader determine that, in the exchange between Muʿāviya and Iblīs, the later is depicted by Rūmī to be truthful in his explanations or whether this is another ruse of him, an accusation that will be repeated several times by Muʿāviya as well. A litmus test to see whether Rūmī portrayed Iblīs as a truthful figure in this particular story is to determine whether Rūmī

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[715] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 2, lines 2630–41, pp. 289–90.
[716] Rūmī, *Dīvān*, no. 1385, line 3, p. 537.

himself also believed in the same philosophical or mystical ideas that he put in Iblīs's speeches. So far, the kind of mysticism which Rūmī's Iblīs discusses in this story is very close to what Rūmī also believed. It is worthwhile to pay attention to the theological approaches of Rūmī and to see how closely Rūmī's Iblīs mirrors those ideas. As a staunch Ashʿarī, Rūmī believed that God needed no created cause (*ḥādiṯ*) or dependent cause (*sabab)* for His actions. God could punish or reward anyone without any justification or cause. In both his *Dīvān* and the *Maṯnavī*, Rūmī repeatedly mentions that if one looks for "logical" reasons for either worldly or mystical phenomena, one will be disappointed, or even worse, misled.[717] In fact, Rūmī believed that in many instances, causes (*sababhā*) were created by God as a veil (*chādur*) to conceal the truth, so that, for instance, a friend might look like the enemy in eyes of the unworthy.[718] Rūmī's Iblīs also does not put much value in the *sabab* of God's *qahr*, because it has no permanence and is created (*ḥādiṯ*). To Rūmī, anything that was *ḥadiṯ* was ephemeral, because it has a beginning and an end, and was therefore unimportant. In the *Maṯnavī*, Rūmī states:

> Hardship and benevolence and happiness and sadness are all *ḥādiṯ*
> All the *ḥādiṯ* die and God is the inheritor.[719]

Iblīs therefore is fixated not on the *ḥādiṯ*, which will eventually disappear, but what is permanent, which is uncreated grace (*lutf-i sābiq*), because that is the unchanging attribute of God. Iblīs then continues his reasoning for what had transpired between him and God:

> Let's assume that refusing to prostrate myself [before Adam] was due to jealousy,
> But that jealousy too comes from love and not out of renunciation.

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[717] Rūmī, *Dīvān*, no. 39, line 11, p. 65, no.41, lines 9–10, pp.65–66, no. 294, line 13 p. 155, no. 485, lines 10–11, p. 220, no. 634, line 5 p. 269; *Maṯnavī*, bk. 1, line 548, p. 28, bk. 1 lines 843–47, p.41.

[718] Rūmī, *Dīvān*, no. 617, line 4, p. 264, no. 751, line 7, p. 311.

[719] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 1, line 1806, p. 82.

Certainly, with every friendship there is a jealousy,
When another becomes the companion of the friend.

The condition for every true friendship is to boil with jealousy,
It is like the condition for every sneeze to say: "Bless you."

Since on His chessboard there was no other move except this,
He told me to play and I did not know what would come next.

I have lost the only move that was left to me,
I throw myself into affliction.

How can anyone free himself, O righteous one,
From the six directions of the chessboard?!

How can the fragment of the six free itself from the entirety of the six,
Especially when the Ineffable One (i.e., God) makes a cunning chess move against it?

Whoever is stuck in the six is in the fire,
Only He who is the creator of six can set him free.

Whether it is unbelief or faith in Him,
It is His handicraft and belongs to Him.[720]

While in the previous story, it was God who showed *ghayrat* for Iblīs when Adam mocked him, in this tale, it is Iblīs's jealousy for God which did not allow him to prostrate himself before anyone else. By claiming that his jealousy was out of love, Iblīs also affirms Rūmī's teaching that if humans act upon vices such as jealousy (*ḥasad*) and avarice (*ḥirṣ*) for the sake of God's love, then such "vices" would not be considered an abomination, but rather something of which to be proud.[721] Rūmī also believed that the condition of friendship was to constantly "brew jealousy" (*ghayrat-pazī*), and in the God-Iblīs relationship this condition was most pronounced.

The final image in this passage depicts God as a master chess player, and Iblīs admits that what happened to him was like playing chess with God, who commanded him to make a bad move,

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[720] Rūmī, *Maṣnavī*, bk. 2, lines 2642– 51, p. 290.
[721] For reference to having avarice (*ḥirṣ*) for God's love see *Maṣnavī*, bk.2, line 1955.

and he had no other option but to lose and bring affliction (*balā*) upon himself.[722] Nonetheless, he declares that he takes pleasure in this *balā*, and by employing a brilliant *īhām*, Iblīs states three times "I am checkmated by Him," or "I am killed by Him" (*māt-i ūyam*, *māt-i ūyam*, *māt-i ūy*).[723] There are several instances in the *Dīvān* where he portrays God as the master chess player, calling him the "king of chess" (*shah-i shaṭranj*).[724] For instance, in a *ghaza*l Rūmī describes us as all pawns on the chessboard of creation, and, as in a real chess game, we are all in service to the *shah-i shaṭranj*, who plays us any way He desires.[725] Rūmī finishes the *ghazal*, which uses the same *īhām* on the word *māt*, which could be interpreted as "checkmate," or "dead,":

> In His deliverance there is death/checkmate/bewilderment, and in His checkmate/ death/bewilderment there is deliverance,
> We are checkmated/dead/ bewildered from that gaze, O King! May that gaze of Yours be upon us/the dead.
>
> dar najātash māt hast va hast dar mātash najāt
> zān naẓar mātim ay shah ān naẓar bar māt bād[726]

The word *māt* as an *īhām* is also used in other places in the *Maṯnavī* . For instance in the story of the birth of Moses, when Moses's father ʿImrān (Amram) was describing God's will to his wife, he states:

> I am like a cloud and you are like the earth and Moses is the seedling
> God is the King of chess and we are all checkmated/dead (*māt*).
>
> O bride, know that being either a winner or being checkmated is all in the hands of God,
> Do not consider that our doing and do not make mockery of us.[727]

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[722] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 2, lines 2645–46, p. 290.
[723] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 2, line 2647, p. 290.
[724] Rūmī, *Dīvān*, no. 2864, line 3, p. 1060, no. 3032, line 21, p. 1121.
[725] Rūmī, *Dīvān*, no. 734, lines 10–18, pp. 305–6.
[726] Rūmī, *Dīvān*, no. 734, line 18, pp. 305–6.
[727] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 3, lines 885–86, p. 381.

Surprisingly, there are places in the *Maṯnavī* where Rūmī calls Iblīs *shah-i shaṭranj*. For instance, he warns the reader that Iblīs is a master chess player who can deceive us in the same way he beguiled Adam:

> He used the kind of deception with your father (i.e., Adam)
> This black face/black rook (*siyah rukh*) checkmated/bewildered Adam.
>
> In playing chess, this crow (*ghurāb*) (i.e., Iblīs) is most apt
> Do not be fooled by him who is playing with half-sleepy eyes.
>
> Because he knows many formidable moves
> [The kind] which will get stuck in your throat like a thorn.[728]

In the main story under discussion, Muʿāviya calls Iblīs the ultimate master chess player, and says:

> O you who on this chessboard, for the sake of remembrance
> Have checkmated a hundred thousand chess masters
>
> O you who by your formidable moves
> Have burned many hearts, and your heart became blackened.[729]

Yet despite being the master chess player, Iblīs claims that he was forced into an impossible chess move by the true King of Chess (i.e., God), and he had no other option but to play despite knowing that it was a losing game. It seems Iblīs is also mocking Muʿāviya by calling him the "noble one" (*sara*) for not knowing that the will of God cannot be challenged.[730] Iblīs, as the master chess player, reminds the reader that no one can beat the one who created the chessboard, an allusion to entire creation which encompasses both belief (*imān*) and unbelief (*kufr*).[731] This is also in line with Rūmī's ʿAshʿarī belief that the creator of all things, including evil, is God. In *Maṯnavī*, before the beginning of the main story under discussion, Rūmī clearly states this Ashʿarī idea:

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[728] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 2, lines 128–31, p. 186.
[729] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 2, lines 2667–68, p. 291.
[730] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 2, lines 2648.
[731] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 2, line 2651, p. 290

If you say these evil things are also from Him—
However, when will this ever be considered His defect?

Those evil things are also His perfection (*kamāl*)
I will give you an example, O lofty one.

A painter makes two kinds of portraits,
One sublime and another one without any refinement

He makes a drawing of Joseph and the Heavenly maidens (*ḥūr*)
He also makes demonic beings and ugly Iblīses.

Both kinds of portraits are testament to His mastery of his craft [*ūstādī-yi ū*)
It is not His ugliness, but it is [a testament to] His attentiveness.

He is able to portray ugliness in its most extreme
And draw all other ugliness towards it,

So that the perfection of His knowledge (*kamāl-i dānishash*) becomes evident
And the denier of His mastery becomes disgraced.

Indeed, if He could not create ugliness, that would be His deficiency
That is why he is the Creator of unbelievers as well sincere people.

So, based on this, both *kufr* and *imān* are a testament
To His Lordship, and both prostrate themselves before His greatness.[732]

For Rūmī's Iblīs, only God who is the Whole (*kull*) as the creator of all things, symbolized by the six directions of the chessboard, can free the part (*juz'*).[733] Since both *kufr* and *imān* are also His creation, Iblīs draws the reader's attention away from his rebellion against God toward the cosmic game that God and he, as two master chess players, played.

Upon hearing Iblīs's claims, Muʿāviya was not convinced, although he admitted that all of these explanations were true.[734] He tells Iblīs "You are made of fire and therefore there is no escape

[732] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 2, lines 2535–43, p. 285.
[733] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 2, line 2650, p. 290
[734] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 2, line 2652, p. 290

for me from your blazes."[735] Fire, however, has mostly a positive connotation in Rūmī's poetry, as it is the symbol of spiritual purity and pain (as in the *Nay-nāma*) and the Divine spark in man's soul. In addition, Iblīs was in fact proud to be made of fire, and therefore to call Iblīs a fiery being is a compliment. Muʿāviya even goes on to call Iblīs an ocean (*baḥr*) and a mountain (*kūh*), while the masses who fall to him are only a drop (*qaṭra*) and a speck (*ẕarra*).[736] In Rūmī's lexicon words like "mountain" and "ocean," which occur in the Qurʾan, are almost exclusively used metaphorically to describe concepts such as "Truth" and "gnosis" (as in *baḥr-i haqīqat* or *baḥr-i maʿrifat*), "knowledge" and "patience" (as in *kūh-i ʿilm*, *kūh-i ḥilm*). Muʿāviya then enumerates Iblīs's wrongdoings against people as evidence of his mischief. However, it seems that none of those fallen nations, such as the people of Sodom, the people of ʿĀd, and the enemies of Noah, were pious and upright people to begin with. The same goes for Nimrūd, Pharaoh, Abū Lahab, and Abū Jahl—all were enemies of the prophets mentioned by Muʿāviya.[737]

As mentioned above, Muʿāviya calls Iblīs a master chess player; and while previously he had been checkmated by God, in these verses, it is he who checkmated all the wicked people.[738] The difference lies, however, in the fact that while Iblīs already knew that he was going to be checkmated by God, he accepted his fate and was joyous in his defeat, while the wicked people never assumed to be defeated by anyone. By choosing these particular groups who, from the beginning, were against God's command and fought against His prophets, Rūmī makes a subtle point: Iblīs is mainly interested in people who are already sinners or who have the potential to become sinners, and by extension, that included Muʿāviya .

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[735] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 2, line 2654, p. 290.
[736] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 2, line 2669, p. 291.
[737] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk.2, lines 2660–66, pp. 290–91.
[738] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk.2, line 2661–68, p 291.

After Muʿāviya refused to believe that Iblīs was capable of doing any good deeds, Iblīs continued:

"Untangle this knot [of stubbornness]!
I am the assayer (*miḥakk*) of the counterfeit and the genuine.

God made me the examiner of lions and dogs
God made me the examiner of the counterfeit and the genuine.

How can I ever make the counterfeit look black-faced?
I am a money changer who only determines the value of it.

I guide the righteous ones
But I cut off the dried branches.

Why do I spread this fodder?
So that it becomes apparent who is animal-like.

If a wolf gives birth to a deer
There is doubt both as to its wolf-ness and deer-ness.

Throw in front of it both fodder and bones
And see to which it will run.

If it goes toward the bone, it is certainly a canine
And if it wants the fodder, it is from the deer family.

Qahr and *luṭf* became companions of each other
And from these two a universe of good and evil was created.

You should offer both fodder and bone
You should offer food for the ego and food for the soul.

If a person seeks food for the ego, he is deficient
But if he seeks food for the soul, he is lordly.

If he serves the body, he is nothing more than a donkey
But if he goes into the sea of soul, he will find the pearl.

Even though evil and good are opposites
They perform the same task.

The prophets offer God's obedience and worship
And the enemies offer lust.

How can I convert good to evil? I am not God!
I am only an inviter; I am not the creator of those things.

Do I turn beautiful to ugly? I am not the Lord!
I am only the mirror of ugliness and beauty.

The Indian set the mirror on fire out of pain
Claiming that this shows man's face as black.

He (i.e., God) made me a truthful informant
So that I may show who is ugly and who is beautiful

I am the witness! There is no prison sentence for the witness
I am not one of the prisoners, God is my witness!

Wherever I see a fruit-bearing bud
I will nourish it like a wet-nurse.

Wherever I see any a bitter and dry tree,
I will cut it down so that the musk may become free of the dung.

The dry [tree] will argue with the gardener: "O Chivalrous one
Why do you cut off my head when I have committed no sin?"

The gardener says: "Be silent, O you with an ugly disposition!
Is being dry, not sin enough for you?"

The dry [tree] says: "I am straight and not twisted."
Why do you cut my roots when I have not committed a crime?"

The gardener says: "If you were fortunate
I wish you were green even if you were twisted.

You could have attracted life-giving water
You could be moist with the water of life.

Your seed and your root were evil
You were not united with a good tree."

Because if a bitter branch is untied with a good one
That goodness will blossom within it.[739]

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[739] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk.2, lines 2672–99, pp. 291–92.

The word "assayer" (*miḥakk*) is used differently from the way in which it was used by ʿAyn al-Qużāt. While for the latter, *miḥakk* was a tool to test Iblīs's love and loyalty toward God, for Rūmī, *miḥakk* was nothing but Iblīs himself, who was an instrument to test the authenticity of an individual's claim to love God. This new role of Iblīs as the assayer (*miḥakk*) of the counterfeit (*qalb*) and the genuine (*naqd*) is Rūmī's invention. Iblīs professes that while he is a guide (*rah-namā*) to the righteous, he is merciless toward the insincere ones. He is the one who separates dogs from lions and wolves from deer by simply offering fodder and bones, which are the symbols, respectively, of good deeds and temptations. Iblīs's position is similar to that of ʿAshʿarīs like Rūmī, who believed that only God was capable of turning people's hearts toward good or evil and the prophets, while the "Devil" only invited (*dāʿī*). Iblīs claims to act simply as a mirror reflecting the good or evil nature of man. He sees his role as that of the prophets—only the opposite—while the prophets invite people toward God, Iblīs invites people away from Him.

There is another role that Rūmī attributes to Iblīs, and that is the role of wet-nurse (*dāya*). While in the last passage, it was God who was the wet-nurse to Iblīs, and suckled him with Divine milk, that duty is transferred here to Iblīs. In Perso-Islamic literature, God is often described as the nurturer (*parvardigār*). In this story however, God nursed Iblīs so that he could later nurse His sincere and select servants and be their guide. Iblīs claims to be an informant (*ghammāz*) who is a truthful (*rāst-gū*) witness (*guvāh*). He claims that he is not and cannot be a prisoner, because it is not customary to imprison a witness, and in turn, he has the honor that God is his witness that he is not a prisoner. This is perhaps in reference to the Qurʾanic story according to which God did not imprison Iblīs for his disobedience, but only banished him. God could have imprisoned Iblīs like He did with two other angels, Hārūt and Mārūt, who sinned against God and were imprisoned eternally in a well, hanging upside down; instead, not only did God not imprison Iblīs, He bestowed

upon him the power of temptation after he swore to lead humanity astray. Therefore, Iblīs is truthful in claiming that God created him not to be among the imprisoned ones, but to be His free and active agent.

The most significant part of this passage is the role of Iblīs as a gardener in charge of pruning and uprooting dry branches, a symbol for unworthy people. Here, the character of Iblīs is suddenly transformed to that of God, and the reader can no longer distinguish whether the speaker is Iblīs or God. In the *Dīvān,* Rūmī repeatedly calls God "the Gardener" (*bāghbān*).[740] The transposition of the image of gardener from God to Iblīs indicates that Rūmī saw Iblīs's work not in opposition to God's, but parallel, and even complementary to it. God had carefully nourished and pruned Iblīs, so that one day he might become a careful gardener of humans and select the best for Him, the Divine Gardener. In this role, Iblīs does not care about the twistedness (*kajī*) of the branches, but whether they are fresh (*tar*) and have sweetness (*khushī*). Anything that is dry (*khushk*) and bitter (*talkh*) will be cut off. What is most important for Iblīs is the good root/origin (*aṣl*) and good seed (*tukhm*). The trees with bad *aṣl* and *tukhm* will complain to the gardener as to why he is coming after them. This is perhaps an allusion to the way Muʿāviya was constantly asking why he was chosen by Iblīs, and in turn Iblīs tells him "because your seed is bad"—again, a reminder that his father and mother were Muḥammad's archenemies.

As the story continues, Muʿāviya remains skeptical of Iblīs's true intentions and prays to God so that he might become free of Iblīs's deceit. In responding to the caliph's prayer, Iblīs provides another explanation as to why Muʿāviya is in error:

> Iblīs said: "Any man who is suspicious (*bad-gumān*)
> Will not hear the truth even if it is given with a hundred signs.

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[740] Rūmī, *Dīvān*, no. 958, line 11, p. 385, no. 1713, line 2, p. 646, no. 2239, line 3, p. 838,

Any mind which is full of imagining (*khiyāl-andīsh*)
When you provide it with proof, becomes even more fanciful.

When the [true] word is heard by him, it becomes a disease
The sword of the holy warrior becomes a tool for the thief.

Therefore, the only proper response to him will be silence and passiveness
It is madness to speak with a fool.

Why do you complain to God about me, O gullible one?
You should complain about the evil of your vile ego.

You eat [sweet] *ḥalvā* and it turns into boils (*dunbal*) on you
You get fever and your humors become disturbed.

Then you curse Iblīs, who is guiltless [in this]
Can you not see that the deception is in you?

It is not from Iblīs, but from you, O lost one!
Who runs after the sheep's fat tail like a fox.

When you see the sheep's fat tail (*dunba*) lying on the grass
That is a trap! Why are you ignorant of this?

You are ignorant because it separated you from knowledge
The desire for the sheep's fat tail blinded your eyes and intellect.

Love of [ephemeral] things made you blind and deaf
Your dark ego is criminal! Do not quarrel with others.

Do not blame me and do not become cross-eyed
I hate evil deeds and avarice and vengeance.

I had done an evil deed and I am still repentant
I am waiting so night might turn into day.

I became suspect among the people
Every man and woman lay their own [evil] deed on me.[741]

Iblīs tells Muʿāviya that the reason for rejecting the truth, even when it is given to him with clear proofs, is that he harbours suspicion deep in his heart. Because Muʿāviya is psychologically and

[741] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 2, lines 2714–27, p 293.

spiritually sick, any evidence that is given him only makes him more suspicious. More importantly, it seems that Iblīs is completely exonerated by Rūmī from being the source of the sins and wrongdoings of people. In the *Dīvān*, Rūmī alludes to the innocence of Iblīs:

> We have become cross-eyed (*kaj-bīn*) by that fraudster (i.e., *nafs,* the carnal soul)
> we developed vengefulness toward the innocent one [perhaps Iblīs?].
>
> [That is why] we are sometimes drunk with the [promise of] the maidens of paradise
> (*ḥūr al-ʿayn*) and sometimes drunk with bread and soup.[742]

Here, Rūmī indicates that people are their own source of lustful behaviour and they should not blame that innocent one—perhaps alluding to Iblīs—because their *nafs* is the source of their becoming cross-eyed, which makes them unable to see the Truth. In the same way Iblīs accuses Muʿāviya of blaming his own sins and blindness on Iblīs.

In another tale in the *Maṯnavī*, Rūmī confirms the assertion that, contrary to mainstream Islamic belief, man's carnal desire, and not Iblīs, is the source of all evil. This is the story about a lustful ninety-year-old hag who is invited to a wedding. [743] She starts to look in the mirror in order to put on her makeup, but no matter how much cosmetic she puts on, her wrinkly face does not look any better. She decides to rip out pages of the Qurʾan and stick them on her face with her saliva, but as soon as she puts on her veil, all the pages fall off. She does this many times, and finally out of frustration utters: "A hundred curses be upon Iblīs."[744] As Rūmī cleverly sums up:

> In that instant, Iblīs appeared suddenly
> And said: "O you ragged unsatisfied whore
>
> All my life I have not imagined such a thing
> And have not seen anyone doing this except you, o whore.

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[742] Rūmī, *Dīvān*, no.1, lines 6–7, p. 49.
[743] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 6, lines 1222–1293, pp. 979–82.
[744] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 6, line 1276, p. 981.

You have sowed such an abhorrent seed
And you left not a single Qurʾan intact in the world.

You are yourself a hundred armies of Iblīses
Leave me alone, O despicable hag![745]

Here, in defence of Iblīs, Rūmī blames the *nafs* for the hag's sinful actions. Rūmī believes that while Iblīs's spiritual sickness (*ʿillat*) was his claim that he was better than Adam, this sickness also exists in the *nafs* of all people.[746] In yet in another passage in the *Maṯnavī*, Rūmī mocks people who assume they are better than Iblīs and the demons, for when the reality of their *nafs* is revealed to them, everyone, even religious people, will be ashamed of themselves.[747]

To continue the narrative, Muʿāviya tells Iblīs that only speaking the truth will set him free. Iblīs in turn asks him:

How can you tell the truth from a lie
O you who are full of fanciful thoughts and suspicions?[748]

This indicates that perhaps Muʿāviya is not able to discern the truth. Muʿāviya insists on hearing Iblīs's real reason for waking him up. Iblīs finally reveals that he woke him up for prayer because if he missed the obligatory morning prayer, he would become sorrowful and the regret for missing the prayer would be a hundred times more meritorious in the eyes of God than the prayer itself.[749] Iblīs then says: "I did all this because I am jealous, and I am an enemy whose job is nothing but deceit and vengeance."[750] This time, Muʿāviya agrees with Iblīs, and tells him that he now believes he is being truthful and tells him that he will never be able to hunt him down.[751]

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[745] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 6, lines 1277–80, p. 981.
[746] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 1, line 3216, p. 144.
[747] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 1, lines 3290–91, p. 147.
[748] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 2, line 2732, p. 293.
[749] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk.2, lines 2765–70, 2781–84, pp. 295–96.
[750] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk.2, line 2785, p. 296.
[751] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk.2, lines 2786–92, p. 296

The question that has baffled many *Maṯnavī* commentators for centuries, is why does Rūmī chose Muʿāviya. This story is the only instance in Rūmī's entire corpus where Muʿāviya is mentioned. Contrary to most commentaries, it is Muʿāviya who is the antagonist, and Iblīs the protagonist. It is noteworthy that from the beginning until the end of the tale, Iblīs never tells a single lie, yet Muʿāviya accuses him of lying and calls him a thief. There are several indications that Rūmī was suggesting that Muʿāviya was the one in the wrong not only in this particular tale but, more importantly, that perhaps he was also an illegitimate caliph. For instance, within the story, the verse in which Iblīs tells Muʿāviya: "The sword of the holy warrior (*ghāzī*) becomes a tool for the thief" (*Maṯnavī,* bk. 2, line 2716) might hint at the historical fact that, for many Muslims, Muʿāviya was a usurper who had stolen the sword (symbolizing the office of the caliph) from ʿAlī b. Abū Ṭalib, the fourth and last Rashidūn caliph whom Rūmī repeatedly calls the true *ghāzī* in his works.[752] Given the fact that Rūmī had the highest reverence for ʿAlī, it would have been highly improbable if he did not know about the hostility between ʿAlī and Muʿāviya . For Rūmī, as for many Sufis, ʿAlī was the perfect man, who was both a warrior and a mystic in possession of esoteric knowledge.

Historically, in the enmity between ʿAlī and Muʿāviya , there were many letters exchanged between the two in which ʿAlī, the caliph at the time, invited Muʿāviya to accept him as the legitimate ruler. One of these exchanges mentioned in the compendium of sermons and letters by ʿAlī called *Nahj al-balāgha* takes the form of a letter (#55) he wrote to Muʿāviya . After chastising him, ʿAlī tells him: "Know that Satan has stopped your return [to goodness] so that you may never

[752] For references to Rūmī's referring to ʿAlī as *ghāzī* see *Maṯnavī*, bk. 1, line 3722–25; *Dīvān*, no. 985, line 6, p. 395, no. 3091, line 6, p. 1145.

do good deeds and listen to good advice."[753] This letter corresponds to the last conversation between Iblīs and Muʿāviya in the tale in the *Maṣnavī* in which the caliph does not listen to good advice from Iblīs. In his book *Rabīʿ al-abrār wa nuṣūs al-akhbār*, al-Zamakhsharī, relates that ʿAlī once told one of his companions whom Muʿāviya was trying to entice into joining his camp:

> I know that Muʿāviya was trying to sow error in your heart and make a breach in your efforts. Beware of him, because obviously he is the personification of Satan, who comes to the believer from front, behind, right and left in order to enter him in a moment of recklessness and remove his good judgment.[754]

These two statements show that ʿAlī viewed Muʿāviya as either a tool in the hand of the Devil, or the Devil personified, and they provide us with a better understanding as to why when Rūmī decided to mention Muʿāviya, he paired him with Iblīs.

Muʿāviya was also reportedly a glutton. In the *Rabīʿ al-abrār* al-Zamakhsharī states that Muʿāviya would eat seven meals a day and he overate so much that he would order his servant: "Come and pick up [the table]. I am not yet sated but I am tired [of eating so much]."[755] Is it a coincidence that out of all vices, Iblīs in this tale picks gluttony as an indicator of animalistic behaviour in humans? In another interesting anecdote, the historian and exegete, Abū al-Fiḍā ʿImād al-Din Ismāʿīl Ibn Kathīr (d. 774/1373), in his book *al-Bidāya wa al-nihāya*, relates that Muʿāviya was gluttonous, and among other things, loved eating a great amount of *ḥalwā* and other

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[753] ʿAlī Ibn Abū Ṭālib, *Nahj al-balāgha*, ed and trans. ʿAlī Naqī Fayż al-Islām (Tehran: Chāpkhāna-yi ʿAzīzī, 1350/1971), 1077.

[754] Abū al-Qāsim Maḥmūd ibn ʿUmar al-Zamakhsharī (Jār Allāh), *Rabīʿ al-abrār wa nuṣuṣ al-akhbār*, ed. ʿAbd al-Amīr Mahnā (Beirut: al-Aʿlamī li al-Maṭbūʿāt, 1412/1992), 4:281.

[755] al-Zamakhsharī, *Rabīʿ al-abrār*, 3:212

sweets.[756] In the tale, Iblīs speaks about the person who develops boils (*dunbal*) due to eating too much *ḥalvā*, and then cursing Iblīs for it could also be a direct reference to Muʿāviya and his appetite for sweets.

A more esoteric interpretation might also help us to understand the dynamics of the story. Throughout the story, Muʿāviya never claims that Iblīs is lying about all the things that he said, and in fact in the story of the *Maṯnavī*, he admits that what Iblīs says is the truth.[757] Iblīs also did not lie about the reason as to why he woke Muʿāviya up, as he maintained that he did not want him to miss his morning prayer. When Muʿāviya insisted that Iblīs reveal his true intentions, Iblīs simply argued that someone like Muʿāviya, who why nature is suspicious (*bad gumān*), will not accept honest proof and will always look for an excuse. Rūmī intends to convey two messages: one exoteric and one esoteric. The exoteric one, intended for the lay reader, is that Iblīs will everything in his power to prevent mankind from gaining a better reward from God. The esoteric one, intended for the seekers and Sufis, is that Iblīs as the gardener, wet-nurse, and assayer of genuineness was put in charge of vetting everyone in order to root out the unworthy and select only the worthiest ones for his Divine Master, who had vetted him in the same manner by "pruning" and nurturing him. Depending on his aptitude, the reader can take either the esoteric or exoteric lesson of the story.

Rūmī is so certain that Iblīs is an agent of God— chosen to do His bidding—that in another tale in the *Maṯnavī*, he recounts a dialogue in which God fulfills all of Iblīs's requests so that he can ensnare mankind:

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[756] Abū al-Fiḍā ʿImād al-Dīn Ismāʿīl ibn ʿUmar ibn Kathīr al-Qurashī al-Dimashqī. *al-Bidāya wa al-nihāya*. Edited by ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbd al-Muḥsin al-Turkī (Cairo: Dār Hijr, 1417/1997), 11:402.

[757] Rūmī, *Maṯnavī*, bk. 2, line 2752, p. 290

Once the accursed Iblīs said to God:
"I need a superb snare for this prey (i.e., mankind)."

God showed him gold and silver and herds of fine horses,
Saying, "With these you will be able to mislead people."

Iblīs [mockingly] said: "Bravo!" but his lips dropped sourly [in disappointment],
He became crumpled and sour like a citron.

Pearls and jewels from fine mines
Were gifted (*pīsh-kash*) to that God-forsaken one (i.e., Iblīs)

Saying: "Take these other snares, O accursed one."
Iblīs replied: "Give me more than this, O You who is the Best Helper."

Oily and sweet foods and expensive sherbets
Were given to him by God, as well as silken clothes.

Iblīs said: "O Lord, I want more than this,
So that I may bind them with 'a rope of palm-fiber' (Q 111:5),

So that the ones who are intoxicated by You that are manly and full-hearted
May break those tethers like true [Sufi] men

So that with the help of these tethers and ropes of desires,
Your true men will become separated from the unmanly ones.

I want another kind of snare, O Sultan of the Throne
A man-throwing snare and a strong one at inventing cunningness."

God brought forth wine and harp and put it in front of him
Iblīs made a little giggle and was semi-pleased.

Then Iblīs made a call to the [divine] pre-eternal Deception (*iżlāl-i azal*),
Saying, "Raise the dust from the bottom of the sea of seduction!

Was not Moses one of Your servants
Who made veils out of the dust on the sea?

The water retreated back from each side
And from the bottom of the sea some dust rose up"

When God showed Iblīs the beauty of woman,
Which overwhelmed the patience and intellect of men

> It was then that Iblīs snapped his fingers [in happiness] and began to dance,
> Saying, "Give it to me quickly; I have attained what I desired."[758]

This story, which is loosely based on a similar one in the *ʿAraʾis al-majālis* of al-Thaʿlabī, depicts Iblīs as the spoiled favorite of God who by throwing a tantrum, receives what he desires, and God gifts to him all sort of things so that he can ensnare mankind. A few issues stand out here. Among them is the fact that Iblīs tells God he is looking for a tool to separate true men from the unmanly (*mard-i tau gardad zi nāmardān judā*), and only true men who are manly enough and full-hearted (*narr va pur-dil*) will be able to break the tethers. Unlike the story of Muʿāviya , this dialogue takes place between God and Iblīs, so there is no hint of supposed deception. God not only does not accuse of Iblīs of dishonesty but grants his every wish until he is completely satisfied. There is also an esoteric and cryptic reference to a primordial divine element, to which Iblīs makes supplication (*sūy-i iżlāl-i azal payghām kard*). This is most likely a reference to one of the names of God, i.e., the "Misleading One" (*al-Mużżil*)." In many places in the Qurʾan, God clearly states that He misleads anyone whom He wishes and therefore Iblīs's appeal to Divine pre-eternal deception (*iżlāl-i azal*) is a clear reference to God. [759] This also fits with Rūmī's assertion that God, as the creator of both good and evil, is also the creator of both guidance and deception. Without reading too much into it, there seems to be a faint element of Zurvanism in the phrase *iżlāl-i azal* which suggests that both guidance and deception are pre-eternal.

Finally, the presence of Moses in this story is thought-provoking. In al-Ḥallāj's *Ṭawāsīn,* Iblīs saw Moses as his inferior who needed to be taught the true meaning of *tauḥīd*. In this story, the spoiled Iblīs asks the following of God: since Moses received the miracle of the parting of the

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[758] Rūmī, *Maṣnavī*, bk. 5, lines 942–60, pp. 769–70.
[759] For reference to God misleading anyone He wishes see Q 4:143, Q 6:39, Q 6:125, Q 7:186, and Q 13:33.

Red Sea and the bringing of some dust out of it to be used as a screen between the fleeing Israelites and Pharaoh's army, God should grant him (i.e., Iblīs) a similar gift, perhaps to as a blindfold in front of men's eyes so that he can lead them astray. God agreed and granted him the beauty of women, which Iblīs considers the best snare of men.

At the same time that Rūmī was espousing his ambiguous and esoteric views on Iblīs in Anatolia, in Fars Abū ʿAbd Allāh Musharrif al-Dīn b. Muṣliḥ Saʿdī of Shiraz (d. ca. 690/1291), one the most celebrated figures of medieval Persian literature, was also writing about Iblīs. While in his two best-known works *Būstān* (in verse) and *Gulistān* (in prose) there are numerous, mostly negative, references to Iblīs, there is one story which portrays Iblīs in a positive light. This reference is in the *Būstān* where Saʿdī relates:

> I do not recall in which book I have read this tale but
> Once a person saw Iblīs in a dream
>
> Iblīs's stature was like a pine tree (*ṣinaubar*) [i.e., upright] and his face was that of a *ḥūr* (i.e., angelic)
> His face was brightly illuminated like the sun.
>
> The person went to Iblīs and asked him: "How strange! Is this you?
> No angel is as beautiful as this
>
> Since your countenance is as beautiful as the moon
> Why you are renowned in the world for being ugly?
>
> Why do the painters of the arch of the king's palace
> Paint your face dark and ugly and depraved?"
>
> When the ill-fated Devil heard this
> He cried and howled mournfully.
>
> Saying: "O fortunate one! It is not my face [which is ugly]
> But the pen is in the hand of the enemy."[760]

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[760] Abū Muḥammad Muṣlih al-Dīn b. Abdallāh Saʿdī Shīrāzī. *Bustān (Saʿdī nāma)*, ed. Ghulām Ḥusayn Yūsufī (Tehran: Intishārat-i Anjuman-i Ustādān-i Adab va Zabān- Farsī, 1359/1980), pp 20–21, lines 395–401.

Using words such as *ḥūr*, sun (*khurshīd*), moon (*māh*), light (*nūr*), and angel (*fîrishta*) to describe Iblīs's real visage and stature is yet another example that by the end of 7th /13th century, Iblīs became known in many literary genres as a figure who possessed two identities. The first was the exoteric one which was described by the orthodox theologians (perhaps to whom Iblīs's was referring in this tale as "the enemy who holds the pen") and mostly to the common people as ugly, monstruous and demonic, and a second esoteric one which appeared to the select few as a radiant and angelic being and conveyer of the truth.

5.5 Conclusion

While Iblīs had been an integral part of classical Persian poetry, the conundrum he represented was brought to light by such pioneers of mystical poetry as Sanā'ī. Yet it was two major figures of Persian mystical poetry, namely ʿAṭṭār and Rūmī, who brought the Iblisophilic tendencies from the masters into the realm of poetry. In the case of these poets, the process of portraying Iblīs in a positive light was a gradual one. None of their early works show any influence of the Iblisophile Sufis of the past, but by the time they began to compose their masterpieces, almost all the key positive esoteric elements in the story of Iblīs began to appear in their poetry. ʿAṭṭār incorporated into his *maṯnavī*s many ideas about Iblīs from ʿAyn al-Qużāt, and to a lesser degree from al-Ḥallāj. However, what ʿAṭṭār did was more than simply retell ʿAyn al-Qużāt's key points about Iblīs. He used many of those key points, but either altered them or brought them in the format of a story, and in the process, introduced new elements. For ʿAṭṭār, Iblīs was above all a selfless lover of God who despite sometimes admitting to his mistake, never gave up on God, nor did he blame Him for

his miseries. Finally, ʿAṭṭār's Iblīs was a downtrodden yet unapologetic lover, much like the heroes of the Persian romances, who sought to be reunited with their beloveds.

While ʿAṭṭār's last works reflect mostly positive views of Iblīs, for Rūmī, Iblīs remained an ambiguous figure. Rūmī used both negative and positive expressions and stories to describe Iblīs. Rather than romanticising Iblīs, like al-Ḥallāj and ʿAyn al-Qużāt did, Rūmī viewed Iblīs as a medium by which he could convey his own message. Therefore, it would not be accurate to call Rūmī a genuine Iblisophile Sufi. While Rūmī did not deny the power of Iblīs's invitation to sin, it is evident that he viewed the carnal soul, *nafs,* as the greatest culprit responsible for tempting humans—while at the same time, in the grand scheme of things, Iblīs remained for him a divine agent. Yet for Rūmī, Iblīs intensely shared mankind's pain of separation from the Beloved and the longing and hope for reunion.

One can say with a certain degree of confidence that Rūmī was the last great Persian mystic who wrote something new and positive on the subject of Iblīs. Although later mystical authors such as ʿAzīz al-Dīn Nasafī (d. 676/1287) and Jāmī (d. 897/1492) also wrote positively about Iblīs, they offered nothing new either in terms of language or content.

Conclusion

The study of the Devil in medieval sources is a subfield still in its infancy. This study is an attempt to broaden our understanding of the diversity of views surrounding the figure of Iblīs that existed in various genres of medieval Perso-Islamic literature, with the focus on his positive portrayal in mystical sources. I have demonstrated the Sufi fascination with Iblīs as a model of resoluteness in his *tauḥīd*, i.e., the steadfastness of his love for God, and shown that Iblīs's appeal was not limited to Sufi or mystical texts. In fact, his appeal had its origins in non-Sufi texts such as histories, legends of the prophets, and Qurʾanic exegeses.

The five chapters in this study demonstrate the interconnectedness of narratives about Iblīs across a variety of genres and religions, and how they purposely portray Iblīs either ambiguously or positively, thereby generally contravening orthodox Islamic dogma. The allure and mystery surrounding the story of Iblīs begins with the Qurʾan, in which there are several key verses that the mystics interpreted as depicting the esoteric nature of the relationship between God and Iblīs. When God banished Iblīs for refusing to prostrate himself before Adam, Iblīs accused God of leading him astray, indicating that between God and Iblīs there was a mysterious dealing not revealed in the Qurʾan.[761] Yet for the mystics, the most esoteric Qurʾanic verses which depict the mutual love between God and Iblīs were in Surat Ṣād, in which God tells Iblīs: "Upon you is My curse" (Q 38:78) to which Iblīs responds: "By Your magnificence, I will surely lead them all astray" (Q 38:82). God's use of the phrase "My curse" is the only instance in the Qurʾan where the first-person possessive suffix *ī* is attached to the word curse (*laʿna*). To some mystics, this is the

[761] Q 7:16 and Q 15:39

greatest honor and a term of endearment that God bestowed upon Iblīs. While according to Q 7:156, God's states: "My mercy (*rāhmat*) encapsulates all," His curse, to which he refers to as "My curse," is only reserved for Iblīs, a fact deemed a great honor by Iblisophile Sufis. Iblīs is also so enamored with God's magnificence (*ʿizza*) that even when he vows to lead humanity astray, he swears to this magnificence.

The various Qurʾanic exegeses on the verse pertaining to the story of Iblīs provide a more colorful picture of the life of Iblīs before he became accursed. While more orthodox *tafsīr*s like that of al-Ṭabarī offer a wide range of side-stories about the life and career of Iblīs before his demise, the esoteric and Sufi exegeses are the ones that depict Iblīs as more or less the innocent party in the story who had to accept and succumb to the Divine will.

Yet for many medieval Perso-Islamic authors, the brief and repetitive Qurʾanic account of Iblīs was not satisfying their curiosity about him. That is why they try to introduce extra-Qurʾanic tales about the life and career of Iblīs before he disobeyed God. Since the Qurʾan also does not mention the fate of Iblīs after he was banished, these extra-Qurʾanic sources fill that gap as well. Iblīs hence became an omnipresent figure in many genres of Perso-Islamic sources such as the legend of the prophets, general histories, and heresiologies. These sources speak of Iblīs's deeds before he was cursed and banished, and they are unanimous in portraying him as the leader and teacher of the angels and the most pious of God's servants. These admirable qualities are not mentioned anywhere in the Qurʾan and are rarely mentioned in the hadiths. While the origins of these extra-Qurʾanic narratives are in Jewish and Christian sources, medieval Muslim authors also added many new elements and twists to these stories which situated Iblīs within the Perso-Islamic context. In many respects, Iblīs's disobediences toward God is overshadowed by the greatness of his service to God, both before and even after he was banished. In many of the stories recounted

in these sources, Iblīs is often portrayed as a positive figure who guides or rebukes humans, and in other cases, he is tasked by God to test humans or reveal some secrets to them. His is often portrayed as a multidimensional and sophisticated character with impeccable beauty and wisdom, a portrayal which is far from the description provided by the orthodox Islamic texts. According to these sources, especially the legends of the prophets genre, Iblīs interacts many prophets and in most cases, he is a tester of the prophet's faith, a task often assigned to them by God. He also puts the faith of the haughty individuals such as Balʿam and Pharaoh to test.

The prevalence of such rich and often positive narratives about Iblīs in non-canonical texts became one of the foundations upon which the early Sufis built their own esoteric interpretations of many of the stories about Iblīs. Among the slew of Iblisophile Sufis, al-Ḥallāj and ʿAyn al-Qużāt stand out as the most ardent advocates of Iblīs in the early Sufi period. Both being of Iranian descent, their brand of Iblisology was most controversial and heterodox. Yet as it has been discussed, both of them must be situated within the intellectual milieu in which Iblisophilic tendencies were rampant. Al-Ḥallāj, who lived in the latter half of the 3rd/9th century, came into contact with many Sufi masters, colleagues, and other people of other faith such as the Shia *ghulāt*, who were also sympathetic to the plight of Iblīs. In such a milieu, al-Ḥallāj became the first mystic who systematically showed his sympathy with Iblīs in his work *Ṭawāsīn*. One of the most shocking aspects of al-Ḥallāj's Iblisology is his juxtaposition of Iblīs with both the prophet Muḥammad and the prophet Moses. For al-Ḥallāj, the mystical experiences of Iblīs and Muḥammad represent different but equally significant visions and stages of esoteric knowledge; while in the case of Moses, Iblīs clearly had an advantage over the prophet when it came to understanding and interpreting the Divine will. In the *Ṭāsīn al-azal wa al-iltibās*, al-Ḥallāj appears as the staunchest defender of Iblīs's refusal to prostrate himself before Adam. Al-Ḥallāj's Iblīs, irrespective of being

cursed or banished by God, is the uncompromising gnostic and *muwaḥḥid*, one who has a pre-eternal and unbreakable relationship with God. This made Iblīs the epitome of *futuwwa* in al-Ḥallāj's eyes, so much so that he declared Iblīs his role model and his mystical companion. Many of the ideas which al-Ḥallāj pioneered in defence and praise of Iblīs became the roadmap for many other Iblisophile Sufis, who model their arguments based on the key concepts which were first espoused by al-Ḥallāj. The most celebrated of those Iblisophile Sufis in the Persian language was ʿAyn al-Qużāt, who not only repeated many of the core ideas of al-Ḥallāj's Iblisology, but also expanded upon them and provided exegesis on some of the more cryptic ones.

Similar to al-Ḥallāj, ʿAyn al-Qużāt also believed that Iblīs and Muḥammad were representatives of different attributes of the Divine. While Muḥammad is the emanation of God's mercy (*raḥmat*), represented by the white light (*nūr-i sapīd*), Iblīs is the emanation of God's severity (*qahr*), represented by the dark light (*nūr-i siyāh*), and the Sufi must be mindful of these two lights, which will always be complementary of one another throughout all creation. ʿAyn al-Qużāt even went further in stating that something would be amiss from the Divine perfection if Iblīs did not exist or did not assume the role which he did. Therefore, to ʿAyn al-Qużāt, Iblīs becomes the dark light representing Divine *ʿizzat*, the beauty mark of the Beloved, and the gatekeeper and *ḥājib* of the Divine court. While for al-Ḥallāj, the grandeur of Iblīs's mystical knowledge was even beyond the understanding of gnostics (*ʿurafāʾ*), for ʿAyn al-Qużāt, one of the last stations of the mystical path (*ṭarīqa*) for the seeker was reaching and full-heartedly comprehending the greatness of the celestial station of Iblīs. Both of these Iblisophile Sufis invites the seeker to learn from Iblīs to be steadfast in the faith, and to not back down from stating the truth even in the face of what might appear as Divine wrath. A true gnostic is the one who can discern the difference between the Divine command (*farmān*) versus the Divine will (*irāda*), and

knows that God's will (*irāda*) always takes precedent over His command (*farmān*) even if the two are in opposition. Hence, a gnostic should always act according to Divine *irāda*, as Iblīs astutely did, even if it causes accursedness and banishment by God—the Divine will was the ultimate guiding hand behind all that Iblīs did. Because the gnostic acts upon the Divine will, not only should he not be afraid of God's curse, but he has to welcome it and display it as a badge of honour. It was no coincidence that the two Sufis who most staunchly supported Iblīs's decision to refuse to prostrate before Adam happened to have been accused of espousing several heretical views themselves and were martyred for their heterodox beliefs. It is also noteworthy to contemplate that the dual role of Muḥammad-and-Iblīs from a Zoroastrian, and specifically the Zurvinite, point of view. While the Devil is generally portrayed negatively in the Zoroastrian tradition, as demonstrated in Chapter 2, there were some elements of ambiguity toward the Devil in the Zoroastrian sources, especially the one that were composed in the post-Sasanian era.

The Iblisographies of al-Ḥallāj and ʿAyn al-Qużāt had tremendous impact on the works of Iblisophile mystical authors who came after them. By the time Persian mystical poetry was in full maturity, in the 6th /12th to 7th /13th century, many of their key ideas were used by Persian mystical poets. Among them, two names stand out: Farīd al-Dīn ʿAṭṭār and Jalāl al-Dīn Rūmī, two people who became the most prolific mystical poets who wrote positively about Iblīs. ʿAṭṭār's mystical Iblisophilic poetry borrows heavily from many important themes in al-Ḥallāj and ʿAyn al-Qużāt's Iblisology, but ʿAṭṭār also adds and expands upon those themes. Since all of ʿAṭṭār *maṯnavī*s are didactic, it is natural that the role of Iblīs also fits within that framework. In many stories, therefore, Iblīs assumes the role of the teacher to various saints and even prophets, one who tries to guide them on the path. Hence, while for al-Ḥallāj and ʿAyn al-Qużāt, Muḥammad or Moses contended with Iblīs to gain Divine favor, for ʿAṭṭār, Iblīs is the teacher of these two

prophets, ordained by God Himself to guide them on the right path and show them the pitfalls on the spiritual path. While ʿAṭṭār's Iblīs appears to be more morose about his downfall, he is never a tragic lover of God, but rather a confident sage who knows that he will undoubtedly one day be rehabilitated to his former majesty.

This image is also repeated by Rūmī, who mostly describes Iblīs as a hidden saint and a divine instrument in charge of separating the good people from the bad and pruning the metaphoric divine garden of any unsavory or dry-minded individual. Borrowing from all his preceding or contemporary Iblisophile Sufi masters, and also from the legend of the prophets, Rūmī depicts Iblīs as a servant of God who is tasked by none other than God Himself to put all humans to the test, and as Rūmī often puts it, separate the husk from the kernel. Therefore, Rūmī's Iblisophilic views must be situated within his utilitarian cosmology according to which God created everyone to serve a divinely designated purpose. Rūmī appears to be the last great Persian mystic who wrote on the topic of Iblīs, and his Iblisology is the culmination of most of the classical literature, both positive and negative, on the topic.

Throughout this study, several hypotheses were established. Perhaps the most controversial of these was that in some sources, contrary to the orthodox accounts which often designates Iblīs as the enemy of God (*ʿaduw Allāh*), God and Iblīs appear to be in cahoots behind the scene; while exoterically, God might show enmity toward Iblīs (the reverse has never been the case), esoterically, God accepts Iblīs as his servant and there is complete harmony between the two. On several occasions, God speaks to Iblīs and instructs him to perform a task, to which Iblīs happily obliges. Iblīs also appears to be omnipresent and is capable of performing great feats which even archangels are not capable of performing. In his encounters with humans, Iblīs appears as a human, although he is shapeshifter and can appear as either male or female. In none of the sources that

were studied is he described as an ugly or fiendish-looking being. In contrast, he often appears to humans as a sage (*pīr*), luminous and handsome and awe-inspiring. The stories about him in Persian mystical sources portray him as a saintly master who espouses divine wisdom and instruct even the greatest of the Sufis masters on how to avoid and overcome the traps on spiritual path. He is rarely depicted as a remorseful or even repentant individual who regrets his refusal to prostrate before Adam. If he has any sadness, it is only because exoterically, he is separated from his Beloved. Despite being cursed and banished, he is often depicted as still a proud being, uncompromising and steadfast in his monotheism, and eternally in love with God, though the love is unreciprocated. For many mystics, he became the most perfect model of Sufi sainthood, one who exoterically was rejected by all, but esoterically and ceaselessly strove for unity with the Divine. For Sufis like al-Ḥallāj and ʿAyn al-Qużāt, this made Iblīs the subject of God's hidden affection, and therefore by exoterically singling him out to be cursed and banished, He esoterically and hiddenly bestowed upon him His highest honor, which is reserved for only a few of His select (*khavāṣ*) and saints (*auliyāʾ*). The famous hadith qudsī "My [true] saints (*auliyāʾ*) areunder My dome, no one knows them but Me" would appear to aptly describe the Sufi view ofGod's relationship with Iblīs whose true sainthood was hidden and known only to God.

Further Study

There remain many sources in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish which need to be examined to further enhance our critical understanding of how the medieval Islamicate sources regarded Iblīs,and how these sources compared to the orthodox negative views toward him.

One of the areas that needs more scholarly attention is the comparative depiction of the Devil in the Jewish and Christian pseudepigraphic and apocryphal writings, and the tracing of their

metamorphosis into various accounts concerning the depiction of Iblīs in the early Islamic sources, including Qurʾanic *tafsīr* and the *qiṣaṣ*. The same is also true of the Jewish and Christian texts that were composed in the Islamicate world from the 2nd/8th to 7th/13th century, and we should investigate any exchange that might have existed between them and the Iblisophile mystics. Another area is the study of the influence of Sufi Iblisology on other heterodox minorities who lived in the Islamic milieu, such as the Druze, the Mandaeans, and most importantly, the Yazidis. While there have been recently informative publications on the beliefs of these minorities, there is still a gap in finding the potential influences and common threads between their Iblisologies and those of the Sufis. There is also a need for a comprehensive investigation of the same topic in the Perso-Islamic sources, especially those composed in the Indian subcontinent from the 8th/14th to13th/19th century. Finally, another area that has been understudied is the fascinating and colorful depiction of Iblīs/Satan in Islamicate paintings and miniatures where his image is often depicted as that of a *sage*, apparently in conformity with his saintly description in some of the previously-discussed medieval sources.

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